

Wonderful Counsellor

Readings: Isaiah 2:1-5; Revelation 21:1-7, 22-27.

Prayer: Lord, may our minds be open to hear and understand what you are saying to us this morning; may our hearts embrace it; and may our wills be ready to obey your word. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Intro

We live in uncertain and unsettling times.

Fortunately here in Nelson we have had no more rude awakenings following the earthquake a fortnight ago but I expect like me you were a bit on edge for the following few days, especially those of you who had gone through the Christchurch earthquake. For the people of Kaikoura and other areas affected by the earthquake it's going to be a long time before life can get back to anything like normal.

Then, on the world scene: Britain unexpectedly voted to leave Europe and, against all predictions, Donald Trump is now president-elect of the United States. The future is looking very uncertain.

In a world of turmoil Advent gives us an opportunity to take stock. It's the beginning of the Church's year, a time when we look back to what God has done in the past in the coming of Jesus and look forward to what he will do in the future when Jesus returns. The focus is all on Jesus and our themes this Advent reflect that. They are there in our Sentence for the day:

"For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6

Today we are going to be looking at the first of those names: Wonderful Counsellor. For those of you who like a 3 point sermon this is going to be a BBC sermon: – **b**ackground, **b**ig picture, **c**ounsellor.

So first the background.

Our sentence comes from Isaiah chapter 9 and the situation then was not too different for God's people than it is today.

At the beginning of Isaiah 9 we read about gloom, distress and darkness so deep they couldn't see the way ahead. What was happening on the ground was that their enemy the Assyrians were moving in and annexing some of the northern parts of the kingdom. They were being turned into

Assyrian provinces and put under Assyrian rule. And the danger was, of course that that could spread with more territory under threat.

And what do you do when your country is in trouble – you look for a leader who will promise to get you out of it. What did Donald Trump promise – that he would make America great again! [You could call it the Trump effect!]

So in Isaiah 9 the prophet promises the people a leader: the government, he says, will be on his shoulders. Who will that leader be? Perhaps he was referring to one of the future kings like Hezekiah or Josiah, but when we look at the names that are given to this future leader that seems unlikely - they never quite came up to the mark. But the qualities suggest that we should look for a future leader especially anointed by God to lead his people out of trouble. For the Jews the names came to be associated with the Messiah, and, of course, for us as Christians, that means Jesus.

In the coming weeks we will look at the other names he is given: Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, but today we are going to look at the first of those names: Wonderful Counsellor.

I wonder what you think Counsellor means. [Talk to neighbour or any suggestions].

The Hebrew word suggests someone more like an advisor, but someone who expects you to act on that advice. In the Bible it is used to describe the advisors Reheboam consulted after the death of his father Solomon. Each group set out a plan of action for Reheboam to follow but unfortunately he chose to follow the advice of the young men with disastrous results. For us, I guess it's a bit like when people got to a budget advisor. The advisor draws up a plan for the client to follow and when they keep to it hopefully things turn out ok, but if they don't then things can get much worse.

So, what does it mean when we describe Jesus as Wonderful Counsellor. In a minute we will look at what that means in our day to day lives but first I want to look at some big picture stuff the second B.

Goldingay translates Wonderful Counsellor as: Wonder-working Planner. Jesus is an integral part of the big plans God has for his creation.

Big picture stuff: the metanarrative of Scripture for those of you that like big words.

God has a plan and a purpose for his creation, including us. In Advent we look back to the first coming of Jesus, his birth as a baby in Bethlehem. But we could look much further back than that. Genesis 1 tells us that “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. But we can go even further back than that – John in Revelation and Peter in his first letter both write about the lamb slain before the foundation of the world. The lamb is Jesus. It was always God’s plan to give us new life in Jesus, and indeed to eventually renew the whole of creation. When we look at Isaiah 2:1-5 and Revelation 21-22, of which we read a part, we get a glimpse of what God’s plans are for his creation. Creation had a beginning and it also has a future.

The candle we lit today is called the candle of hope, and the hope we have is for a future like the one described in our readings. So, what are the plans that Jesus as the Wonder planner has in mind for us? What will it will be like? Remember both Isaiah and John are using picture language. Let’s look at Isaiah first. What do we see in Isaiah 2:1-5?

Isaiah: people coming to God – the mountain on which the temple was built and the temple itself were places where God seen to dwell.

The idea of people wanting to walk in God’s ways means God’s laws recognized throughout the world.

Disputes are settled.

No more war. (think back to Tristan’s picture prayer last week).

Is that happening now?

No.

Some of you older folk might remember a track by Simon and Garfunkle that highlighted the difference. [They sang Silent Night with a news bulletin being read in the background. It was a very powerful statement.]

[play CD]

Isaiah’s vision was for the future.

As was John’s. What does John’s vision look like? Remember he was writing at a time when God’s people were under threat of persecution and being pressures by the society around them.

Revelation: renewed heavens and earth – no more sea, sea as source of evil and all that is opposed to God. God dwelling among his people – all living in God’s presence. No more death or mourning or tears.

Old order of things has passed away.

New way of ordering things and when this happens the harmony that Isaiah looked forward to can happen.

Revelation also talks about the kings bringing their splendour into the city: – all good things are carried over into the new creation. Gates never shut – not a gated community – no need for protective walls.

In one sense its beyond our imagining.
But it awaits the future coming of Christ.
We can look forward to it but what about life now?

This is where we leave the big picture stuff for a moment.
As the Wonder-working Planner Jesus is a major player in the big picture stuff. As the slain lamb he is the one by whose death we, and all of creation, are redeemed.

But how about the ordinary day to day stuff? This is the C bit for all you 3 point sermon lovers. Jesus as wonderful counsellor.

Peter in his second letter asks? In view of the coming end of the world as we know it, What kind of people ought you to be? Perhaps in our context we would ask – whose advice, whose voice, are you going to listen to? Whose values are you going to live your life by?

How does Jesus become our Wonderful Counsellor, the Advisor whose advise we need to listen

We know he is more than ready to help us if we ask for his help. James tells us “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God ... and it will be given to you.” Jas 1:5. Last Tuesday some of us were going through part of the Alpha Prayer course and it was all about how we can ask God for guidance.

God can and will guide us in specific situations but importantly he guides us through the advice he has already given us – the word he has already spoken; his written word: the Bible, especially the New Testament, and Jesus, the Living Word. In the gospels we have Jesus’ teaching and living example of how we ought to live.

We need to be reading our Bibles so that we can see how to live well but also what to avoid. In Revelation John’s description of Babylon is very like what goes on in our western self-indulgent, consumer society – getting ahead at the expense of others - but ultimately it has no lasting

value. It's like building on sand, in the earthquakes of life the building collapses as a result of liquefaction.

We are called to live in a different way. To follow the teaching and example of Jesus so that we are living in right relationships with God, with one another and with creation.

In Isaiah 2 the prophet urges the people to walk in the light of the Lord and we get a glimpse of what life can be like when God is in charge; the harmonious relationships that the Prince of peace wants to see established.

We start with ourselves as we let his advice, his word, shape how we live.

Also as a community of God's people we are called to model right ways of living. Do you remember we had a series on A Culture of Honour when we talked about respecting one another and how to react when problems cropped up. We need to be putting those things into practice.

Then we are called to be salt and light in our community – to play what part we can in the right ordering of society, whether it's in the area of relationships, social justice, creation care or whatever.

God sent Jesus to be our Wonderful Counsellor so that, by heeding his advice – which means not just listening to it or reading about it but following it – by heeding his advice we can begin to be changed and we can begin to bring about change in the world around us. We recognize that the pictures we see in Isaiah and Revelation are not going to come about by our efforts but we can begin to establish that right government that this child – Jesus – came to bring.

Let's pray.

Father God, thank you for sending Jesus to be our Saviour and also the Lord of our lives, our Wonderful Counsellor and the one we need to listen to. Help us to hear your word to us today and through this season of Advent. As we look at the unsettled background of our lives, and as we look at the wonderful future you have planned for us, help us to become the people you want us to be so that we may bring your light into the dark places of this world. We pray this in and through the wonderful name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen