

A Reflection from Leisa on this week's readings from Isaiah 51.1-6 & Matthew 16.13-20

Look to the Rock

'Look to the Rock from which you were hewn' – words from the first verse of our Old Testament reading. We have a tendency to look back as part of our way of understanding who we are, and why things are as they are. 'Look back to Abraham and Sarah' the prophet instructs the people – to try and understand your situation.

The people he was talking to were Jews, living in Babylon, but on the verge of returning to a homeland, which many of them would never personally have known as the exile in Babylon had lasted for over a generation. The prophet was encouraging the people – encouraging them to step out into the unknown, because this was God's purpose for them. Not all of them returned, just as some of our friends and loved ones, have not returned to church or life in the community.

Abraham and Sarah, stepped out into the unknown, they journeyed to the 'promised land' although they never possessed it; they lived in faith and hope, but with a great deal of insecurity – not just for them but for all those who would follow in the generations to come. They held onto to God's promise of comfort and joy, justice and peace - in their present 'here and now' as well as in the journey that was unknown. They held on to the promise that their story though difficult and disheartening at times, would embody a blessing, not just for themselves and their descendants, but for all 'peoples'.

Do we look back to look forward?

We may look back to days of imagined security, when things were better, when the churches were fuller, Christianity more highly regarded in society, and the Sunday Schools busy - when masks and handwash were not part of our worship! We wish it were like that today. But I am not sure that this kind of looking back helps us to look forward with faith and hope. We can get a bit trapped by the ground we feel we have lost; we are aware that there aren't enough of us - or not enough of us with energy – to recreate that past. But what about looking back "*to the Rock from which you were hewn*"? That would be a different matter. Let's turn to our Gospel reading: there is another *rock* here. Peter and his confession of faith will lead him to open doors to the Good News for many, in his response and calling to the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ.

Like Abraham and Sarah, the prophet Isaiah and Peter the rock, we too are invited to look forward to all the good that *God* will do and cooperate with it. We are called to be a blessing to this generation and the next; through Covid 19 and social distancing, the daily news of loss of life, global and national injustice and especially through our unique experiences of life, through each new day. God's purpose and promise is still to bring comfort and joy, justice and peace, not just to us, but to 'all peoples', whatever we are facing, in all that has been lost and gained.

'Look to the rock from which you were hewn': when we look backwards, let's make sure we do it in order to look forward - as we are the called and gifted by God, in his plan for a good purpose and Peaceable Kingdom for us all.