Isaiah 61.1-4

Rebuilding the Ruins

Amington (Online)

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Build, build, build [1]

Building

I've always enjoyed building things. It started out with LEGO as a child – though I've recently discovered there are some colossal LEGO kits aimed at grown-ups...

I've always enjoyed building things, but the results have been mixed. For one school project I made a small bookshelf for my cassette tapes – only the shelves were so wonky the cassettes fell over, and the dovetail joints didn't, well, *dovetail*. But then as a home project I designed and built a cabinet for my hi-fi – which is still in my study, with my hi-fi in it, today.

I wonder what things you build? It may be a *thing* like a cabinet or a garden, it may be a home, a family, a career, a team. It may be you are laying a foundation for your future through education – we all build; in fact we were *made* to build, to create.

Jesus' Ministry

Our reading today – coming all the way from one of our mission partners, Ruth in Burundi – is one of the most important passages in the Bible. Why? Because it summarises Jesus' ministry.

In Luke 4, at the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus went into the synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath day. He picked up the scroll containing these words in Isaiah, and read them out.

> Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'

Luke 4.20–21 (NIV)

Have a look through the first three verses of Isaiah 61 yourself later, and you'll see a description of Jesus' ministry: proclaiming **good news for the poor**, binding up **the broken-hearted**, releasing **prisoners from darkness** – and so on.

But it's not only about him and what he did; it's also about what *we* do once he has swapped our **ashes** for a **crown of beauty**, our grieving for the **oil of joy**, our **spirit of despair** for a **garment of praise**. And we do, is *build* – or rather, *rebuild*.

Restore and Renew

Have a look with me at verse 4:

> They will rebuild the ancient ruins
> and restore the places long devastated;
> they will renew the ruined cities
> that have been devastated for generations.

Isaiah 61.4 (NIV)

In one sense these words have a literal meaning: Israel's **places** and **cities** had been literally **ruined** and **devastated** by invading armies.

But I suspect we can all relate to this verse on a spiritual level: for many of us it wouldn't take long to identify areas in our lives and in our communities – and in our church family – that are **ruined** and **devastated**, not least since the lockdown started in March.

Did you notice there are two kinds of rebuilding?

First there is **restoring**: bringing back what was there before, picking up the ruined pieces and putting them back together again. But there is also **renewing**: making something better than it was before, or using the opportunity to correct any mistakes.

I once wrote some software for a school. They wanted something a bit like Facebook, to link pupils with ex-pupils who were acting as mentors, giving careers advice.

When you build software, the building blocks are often things called classes. Each one does a particular thing, and bit by bit you put them together like bricks, and end up with an application.

And so I made a class to represent a pupil – which linked to a class which represented a mentor, so you could see which mentors a particular pupil was working with. Very useful.

Unfortunately I also made a link the *other* way, so you could see the pupils a mentor was helping. Useful – except as the software loaded a pupil, it loaded that pupil's mentors, then each mentor's pupils, then those pupils' mentors, then those mentors' pupils...

It's called an infinite recursion error, and it's *bad*. The thing was, it worked fine with a small amount of test data, so we didn't realise what I had done until we loaded all the pupils and all the mentors – and the application totally crashed.

It took days to find the problem, and because it was with one of the fundamental bricks, the mistake infected every part of the software, so it needed to be completely rewritten.

Oaks of Righteousness

My friends, as we begin to rebuild after the devastating effects of the lockdown – and let's not forget, COVID-19 has not gone away – we need to be wise.

We need to be wise about the things that we **restore**, the things where we pick up the pieces and put them back together as before.

And we need to be wise about the things that we **renew**, the things where we use this opportunity to fix mistakes, to make them better.

When you think about your life and faith as a disciple, as a member of your church family – what things do you need to **restore**, and what things do you need to **renew**? Personally I'm trying to renew my own pattern of prayer, and hopefully *our* pattern of praying for and with one another.

But whatever we build – **restoring** *or* **renewing** – we need to have in mind these words from Isaiah 61 verse 3:

> They will be called oaks of righteousness,
>> a planting of the Lord
>> for the display of his splendour.

Isaiah 61.3 (NIV)

Oaks... oak grows slowly, but it grows strong. There are no quick fixes and shortcuts here. The life of a disciple is not easy, it takes a lot of effort – but exactly like Jesus, God anoints us with the Holy Spirit to help and enable us to grow.

Righteousness... a life of holiness and godliness is not an optional extra, but the essence, the shape, the form, the way of being a disciple. And what does righteousness look like? We could do a lot worse than looking at the pattern of Jesus' own ministry, in verses 1-3; as his disciples, we should be following in his footsteps.

Are we?

Build, build, build

Our summer series is called 'Build, build, build'... my hope is that it helps us:

- Make Jesus the foundation and pattern of all we do

- Discern what we need to restore, and what we need to renew

Please pray through those two things as we read and study the Scriptures over the coming weeks.