

Evensong 18th October 2026
Isaiah 61:1–6 and Colossians 4:7–18

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Some parts of the Bible immediately capture our imagination. Tonight's reading from Isaiah is one of them: good news for the oppressed, liberty for captives, comfort for those who mourn. These are words that reach into the deepest longings of the human heart.

Then we come to the end of Colossians, with its unfamiliar names, personal messages and arrangements for delivering letters. We might wonder whether we have moved from the heights of prophecy to the church pew leaflet.

Yet these readings belong together. Isaiah shows us the promise of God's restoration. Colossians shows us something of the people through whom God's work takes shape.

And between them, they invite us to consider our own calling.

Isaiah begins:

**"The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me."**

The speaker has been commissioned for a purpose: to bring good news to people whose lives have been wounded by poverty, captivity, grief and devastation.

Notice where God's attention falls. On those who are oppressed. On the broken-hearted. On prisoners. On those who mourn. Anyone else think they sound remarkably familiar to what we hear in the Gospels of the New Testament. The rhythm and shape of these words strike a chord. That is no coincidence. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus reads from this passage in the synagogue at Nazareth and declares that it is fulfilled in their hearing. These words help us recognise the character of his ministry. He brings healing, restores people to fellowship, welcomes those who have been excluded, and announces God's kingdom.

These are people who may have little reason to expect that tomorrow will be different from today. Yet God's messenger announces that their present circumstances will not have the final word.

There will be a garland instead of ashes, gladness instead of mourning, praise instead of a faint spirit.

The promise is that God comes to meet people within their suffering, bringing the possibility of a future they cannot yet see.

But Isaiah's vision contains a remarkable development. Those who receive restoration become people who restore:

**“They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations.”**

The people who have suffered are given a part in rebuilding their common life.

That matters because it is easy to imagine Christian service as something done by strong people for weak people. Isaiah offers a richer vision. Those who have needed comfort may become people whose compassion sustains others. Those who have experienced exclusion may help create a more welcoming community.

Their suffering was not good or necessary. Yet it need not exhaust the meaning of their lives. God gives them dignity, agency and a future.

Then we turn to Colossians and discover a community in which ministry is shared among many people.

Character after character is named alongside their purpose – the first will carry news and encourage hearts, the second will travel with the first, the third will share Paul's imprisonment, the fourth is to be welcomed, the fifth perseveres in prayer, the sixth offers hospitality, and the seventh is reminded to fulfil the ministry he has received.

Each has a different contribution to make.

This is how the great promises of God begin to become visible in ordinary places.

Someone opens a home. Someone carries a message. Someone remembers a struggling congregation in prayer. Someone welcomes a person who needs to know that they belong.

Consider the instruction concerning Mark: “if he comes to you, welcome him.”

Such a short sentence. Yet how much can depend upon it.

A welcome can determine whether someone remains a stranger or begins to find a home. For those of us who were at this morning's service, it was truly noticeable how many new faces there were in the congregation. It is wonderful to see, and this is no one-off aberration. Nearly every Sunday this year we have seen one or two new faces in our congregation and so this plea to "welcome him" is as important for us today as it was nearly 2000 years ago.

Yet neither reading allows us to imagine that faithful ministry guarantees an easy life.

Isaiah speaks of devastated places. Paul writes as a prisoner. Near the end, he asks simply: **"Remember my chains."**

The person encouraging the Church also needs the Church's care.

Perhaps some of us come this evening feeling more like those who need building up than those ready to rebuild. We may be tired, bereaved, uncertain, or conscious of how little we have to give.

There is room for us here. The Church's shared life includes receiving care as well as offering it. Sometimes our calling is to carry another person; sometimes it is to allow ourselves to be carried.

As this day draws towards its close, we can place both our service and our need into God's hands.

And we might carry one question into the coming week: what small part in God's work of restoration has been entrusted to me?

A welcome to offer? A person to encourage? A practical task to undertake? A prayer in which to persevere?

Isaiah gives us the great horizon of God's promise. Colossians gives us names, relationships and particular acts of faithfulness.

Our names, too, belong within that continuing story.

And the final word is grace. Paul closes: **"Grace be with you."**

The grace of the God who comforts us, gathers us, and calls us to share in the rebuilding.

Amen.