

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Easter 2020.

Isaiah 26:1-4. 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. Psalm 36:5-10. John 21:1-14.

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

The Collect: Almighty God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men: grant that thy people may love the thing which thou commandest, and desire that which thou dost promise, that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

One of my favourite verses of scripture is found in this week's portion from Isaiah (26:3) 'Thou shalt keep him perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusts in thee.' If you would like to listen to a short anthem with this title by Samuel Sebastian Wesley, here is a link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ZDPcXOI7Mw>

Interestingly, in the preceding verse, God sets up salvation **יְשׁוּעָה** Yeshua (Jesus) as a wall (a protection). Perfect peace is: **שְׁלוֹם שְׁלוֹם** shalom shalom. This is all very encouraging. With Christian insight we may see that perfect peace and protection is found in none other than our Lord Jesus. But this is conditional.

Have you been in a situation of late when you have felt uncertain, threatened, anxious, worried, and helpless? The list could go on. Sometimes our lives seem to be filled with these negative emotions, and life is too difficult for us to handle. We try something to help someone, and it doesn't work, or worse, it is ignored, and the consequences could have been avoided. But, almost everyone will recognise the reality that we are only human and, though some may display their genius from time to time, there will always be a situation in which we are out of our depth. When was the last time we felt shalom shalom, perfect peace?

Just read that verse again: 'Thou shalt keep him perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusts in thee.' Now let me distort it by taking God out of the equation. 'I will keep myself in perfect peace, when I get my mind round this problem, because I know I can sort it out.' Alternatively, the previous verse: 'he sets up salvation as a wall' could read: 'I'll be safe if I protect myself.' Again that leaves Jesus out of the equation. Do we really think this will keep us in perfect peace?

So, back to the favourite verse. It struck me powerfully when I first heard a costumed performance of the High Priest of Israel. I saw and learned that talk when I worked for the Church's Ministry amongst the Jews. Some of you will have seen it performed. The clothes of the High Priest all have symbolic value. On his mitre/turban he had a gold frontlet engraved with the words: 'Holy to the Lord' (Exodus 28:36). This was a reminder to him to have God at the very forefront of his mind as he went about his work in God's appointed ministry. The other priests also had to wear it. Jesus himself, in obedience to the Torah, wore a leather box on his forehead (and left arm) called a phylactery (Deuteronomy 6:8) which contained verses to love the lord thy God. The point of these outward signs was that God should be at the forefront of our mind, and in our heart.

In a way, it is a pity that we don't have that visual aid to remind us, and others, that our mind and heart is stayed on Him. Perhaps wearing a crucifix hints at devotion, but it has lost a lot of its power. I remember someone asking in a jewellery shop for a gold cross, the one with the little man on it! The only way we will have perfect peace is to remind ourselves that Jesus is our peace. We won't find perfect peace through our own effort or resources.

I said it was conditional. The condition is that we **trust** Him. If we don't trust Him, we are taking off the frontlet 'Holy to the Lord'. We are saying that He is not at the forefront of our mind or heart in every situation. We are saying that we would rather sort things out without Him. Our mind is stayed on self; our protection is by our own strength and meagre resources. Are we really that bold, or foolish?

Christ is risen. Alleluia.
Can you say: He is risen indeed?