

Isaiah 58:6-12

⁶ Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
⁸ Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you,
the glory of the Lord shall be your rearguard.
⁹ Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
¹⁰ if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.
¹¹ The Lord will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters never fail.
¹² Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.

Sisters and Brothers!

The prophet Isaiah didn't know Nelson Mandela.

But I'm sure Nelson Mandela knew these words of the prophet Isaiah!

He not only experienced the Apartheid, the suffering of his sisters and brothers, he not only experienced his prison cell and maybe some thoughts full of resignation for his South African people, their lost hope for justice. I'm sure Nelson Mandela also knew this bold counter-project of human kind. This promise of a life that gives back to us our human dignity and makes life beautiful.

It is nothing more than an insult to ourselves, when we say: I am not able to act justly! It is a betrayal of the power of our life, of the power of our faith, when we leave the prisoners imprisoned, the starving people in hunger and the tortured people without comfort.

How different are the words God speaks to us. Not often are we encouraged with words like these:

You can be light, as beautiful as the dawn. You can act justly, your justice shall go before you. Even your darkness can be like the noon, like bright and warm sunlight. You can be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail, a spring that offers abundance without calculation: to the thirsty earth, to thirsty people.

And we will be called by new names:

the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in. These are the names we will be given.

There is so much light coming into our world! In words, so different to those, which only show us our own powerlessness and the cold around us.

Isaiah offers a better life, he comes with the attraction of a rarely existing beauty and dignity:

That's the way it could be. That's the way one can live. The way you can live. You don't have to hold back all your possibilities in life. You are free to share. By giving your life your wealth will grow, your wealth of living as a human being, your wealth of shaping life in justice, determination and clarity.

“Your light shall break forth like the dawn”

Life becomes new in the light of the oncoming day. We learn to see. We get rid of the dark glasses that leave us as spectators. We are free to accept the pain, the empathy, the outcry and the action against the social injustice in the world.

“The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places and make your bones strong”

You are cared for. You can stop chasing after the bread. You do not *have* to share, you have the great option to share, your needs, your bread, your home, your heart. There is enough for everyone.

“You shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in”

You are known and called by God. You have got your own face, your own heart and you can be without fear. Whatever we do, it need not be as spectacular as the life of Nelson Mandela. But opening a

pathway to justice for another person or another nation, providing a healthy space for body and soul, repairing the breach, restoring streets, supporting the face-to-face encounter and giving reconciliation a chance - all of these are possible.

That's the way God meets us: he attracts us to a different life in which he calls us with our new names. And those who starve will have enough bread. Those who are naked will have enough clothes. Those in debts will be relieved. Nations will breathe a sigh of relief. And God says: Here I am, I am not far away, I am closely at your side. So that Justice and Peace can come true.

And all of a sudden there will be enough bread for more than only ourselves. We will discover our dignity and freedom to share. Our ears will be open:

You can be light, as beautiful as the dawn, you can act justly, as bright as the noon, as warm as the sun, you can be a watered garden, a life-spending spring of water. Who else but God himself talks to us like that!

And we start answering by repairing the breach, restoring the streets and by spreading light.

The prophet Isaiah didn't know Nelson Mandela.

But he was waiting for him, hoping for him and desiring him.

Nelson Mandela responded with his whole life to God's desire for a new creation.

Today Isaiah is waiting for us, for you and me.

He is waiting for us to respond to God's great desire. He is waiting for us to become the great people the bible text is speaking of.

We give thanks to God for Nelson Mandela. We ask for God's blessing onto our lives in justice and in love. Amen