

Sermon for 10th October 2021 on Isaiah 38:9-20

Pastor Wilko Hunger, Bryanston

Grace be with you and peace from Him
who was and who is and who is to be! Amen.

I.

Once you do everything for the last time.

You may not know it when the time comes,
but the day will come.

For the last time you shake the bedsheet.

For the last time you eat your bread.

For the last time you hold the hand you love.

A mundanity.

A snapshot.

But in it dwells so much that is final and profound.

*Prepare your house - arrange your things - ,
because you will die and not stay alive.*

If there is time at all.

Maybe it would be good to say goodbye,
to have things sorted out.

But maybe it will happen too quickly.

Without preparation.

Without you yourself having to feel the pain of farewell beforehand.

But others will feel it.

There will come a day
that you won't bring to an end.

You know it.

I know it.

We carry it in us and on us,
already in the midst of life.

II.

*Prepare your house - arrange your things -,
because you will die and not stay alive.*

Isaiah says this to King Hezekiah.

Calmly he says it.

You are going to die.

Soon.

And this sentence changes everything.

Even a king does not have the power
to prolong his life.

That's not just 'sort of' true,
but it is suddenly, inevitably true.

Hezekiah searches for words,
where no words will do.

*In the prime of my life
must I go through the gates of death
and be robbed of the rest of my years?
'I will not again see the Lord himself
in the land of the living;
no longer will I look on my fellow man,
or be with those who now dwell in this world.
Like a shepherd's tent my house
has been pulled down and taken from me.
Like a weaver I have rolled up my life,*

*and he has cut me off from the loom;
day and night you made an end of me.*

III.

That's how I am right now, says Hezekiah.

I am like a tent
that collapses all at once.

I am like a piece of cloth
that is being woven,
and then the weaving and the living stops,
before I feel ready.

I am cut off.

From everything.

From people –
because they will remain when I must go alone.

From the world –
because it will go on turning without me.

Perhaps it is precisely this realisation.

That everything will go on.

That his death will not bring the world to a standstill,
except for himself.

Cut off from everything.

But not cut off from the one who connects everything.

Who holds the world and himself together.

Hezekiah does not want to die.

So he laments to God:

I cried like a swift or thrush,

I moaned like a mourning dove.

My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens.

I am being threatened; Lord, come to my aid!

IV.

You will die and not remain alive.

Isaiah's word struck Hezekiah and knocked him down.

But God shows mercy.

Hezekiah will get well after all.

He still has time.

Fifteen years -

you will know in retrospect.

You never know beforehand.

But for Hezekiah it's not the number that counts.

What counts for him is that he can still weave a little further in his life.

A few more threads,

a new pattern.

It is colourful,

more colourful, perhaps, than before.

But there is also something else in it.

Gratitude and pain.

Gratitude for the time given.

And pain for having looked into the abyss.

V.

There is that one moment at some point in life.

The one when you grasp -

no, actually you don't grasp it,
but it grips you -
that everything will pass away.

Your youth
and your life
and many an illusion and naivety.
That you can't hold on to anything,
no song
and no love
and not your time.

This realisation somehow grips you.
Seizes your heart and your thoughts.

And then life is different.

Not permanently.

But in the middle of your colourful life
a black thread is woven.

It is simply there
and never quite disappears again.

VI.

King Hezekiah is given fifteen more years.

Some will be given twenty-five years or more.

And some will not get a single day.

You do not know how much time you have left.

You continue to weave your life.

But what you weave into it - you can sense that -
is all a gift.

The colours and the patterns.

The love you weave into it.

It is yours, and yet not yours.

King Hezekiah is careful with his given time.

He doesn't know how much it is.

But he knows that the time is a gift.

That's why he uses the time.

Not for a completely different life,

but for a more conscious one.

He weaves a song of gratitude

into the pattern of life which is his own and is not.

For the grave cannot praise you,

death cannot sing your praise;

The living, the living – they praise you,

as I am doing today.

VII.

Death does never break the thread

with which we hang on God.

I weave my life.

You weave yours.

And God weaves with you.

There is another thread.

This thread has a name.

Jesus.

Interwoven with us,

equal to us in life and in death.

They cut his thread of life off
at Calvary.

And God did not leave him in death.

This thread holds.

Through life and death.

All the way to God.

Death does never break the thread,
with which we hang on God.

This thread is golden.

Golden like the straw in the manger.

Golden like the new morning's rays of sunshine.

This thread is not simply woven into our lives.

It is our life.

Our new life in the midst of the old.

Hezekiah sings.

We sing.

No one knows for how much longer.

But we sing.

That's what matters.

Amen.