

Homes are in the headlines – the problems of home affordability and home accessibility. Around Australia, churches with declining (or no) congregations are being converted into private homes, like the Anglican Church of the Transfiguration in Brisbane. About that church conversion, the Better Homes and Gardens promo led with: *“You certainly needed a grand vision of biblical proportions to transform the church into a family home.”* The TV hosts described the new rumpus room as a *“religious church of fun”*; the kitchen bench as a *“modern-day altar”*; ‘the stairs to the master bedroom a *“stairway to heaven.”* How to achieve the vision of that “dream build”? The host answered saying: *“Belief - that’s what it comes down to!”* The TV presenters at least have a memory of Christianity and they know just a little biblical language! In the Australian church, are biblical words becoming a memory of church life that is now fading? Returning from Indonesia - where the church is growing rapidly even as it suffers greatly - what has surprised me is the number of people I once knew as followers of Jesus who are now too busy to believe; who no longer prioritize gathering to worship God– some drifting; others no longer following Jesus. Only 15 percent of Australians attend church – and on average only once a month. We might be tempted to think that threats to the gospel are greater than God; or that in secular Australia that the darkness is winning and the church dying. It is helpful to pause and to ponder:

Do we have a faith (belief) for the future and a biblically informed vision of the church? Do we want God to act in our community? What kind of people and church are we hoping to become?

The prophet Isaiah paints a picture of the future God is preparing for his people to inspire us to have great faith in our global God. Isaiah’s vision is of a servant-king who brings salvation to Israel and to the nations by undergoing judgment for sin and restore a fallen world into a new creation.

A. Seeing God’s Glory: (Isaiah 6:1-3; John 12:41; Revelation 21-22) 1. God is incredibly beautiful.

*In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: **“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”***

Before Isaiah shows us the future, he shows us God’s glory which is the sum total of his beautiful perfections and radiant purity. Such glory is too bright for sinners to see. ‘No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known’ (John 1:18). God’s “best photograph” is Jesus – in whom we glimpse glory! **‘Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him’** (John 12:41). This is Jesus whom the apostles Peter, James, and John saw on the Mount of Transfiguration with his ‘clothes **dazzling white**’ (Mk 9:3); **‘bright as lightning’** (Lk 9:29); **‘white as the light’** and his ‘face like the **sun**’ (Mat 17:2).

2. The future is incredibly bright for believers. The vision of Jesus transfigured prefigures Isaiah’s description of the new creation where “the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory” (Isaiah 60:19), words used by John to describe our future new creation home: ‘the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, with the glory of God’ (Rev 21:9-11; 19-21; 22:5). Can you imagine yourself there, then? Here and now, life is not always bright and light!

B. Understanding the World’s Story: (Is 59:1-15) Sin is indelibly dark. Society is pervasively blind.

Isaiah prophesied in the 8th century BC about the experience of Judah in the 6th century B.C.

Tens of thousands of Jewish exiles returned from Babylon to Jerusalem. Life was difficult. The city was in ruins. There was gloom and despair everywhere. Their city and their hearts were both dark. *"Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear"* (Is 59: 1-2). The land was filled with lying, injustice, violence, murder (59:1-9).

The people confessed: ***'We look for light but all is darkness: for brightness but we walk in deep shadows. Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like people without eyes. At midday we stumble as if it were twilight; among the strong, we are like the dead.'*** (Is 59:9-10)

The Old Testament church was reflecting the corruption in society because of sin within. Into that darkness, God's arm works salvation (59:16), judging evil (59:18); delivering repentant people (59:20).

C. Hearing God's Call to the Church: (Isaiah 60)

3 Movements to observe.

God is coming to the world (Is 60: 1-2) *Your light has come. The glory of the LORD rises upon you.*

The world is coming to God (Is 60:3-14) *Nations will come to your light. Kings to the brightness...*

Peace is coming to the world (Is 60: 15-22) *I will make peace your governor...well-being your ruler.*

3 Commands to obey.

'Arise, shine, for your light has come and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you.' (Isaiah 60:1-2)

Arise: Not get out of bed but rise from the deadness of disobedience. So, wake up! Wake up to who God is and to what he has called the Church to be in and for our society.

Shine: Israel's mission was to be a light to the nations (49:6). Their unfulfilled mission was transferred to Jesus who commands us to be people of light. So, brighten up!

See: God has returned with salvation. He gives his people his presence by his Spirit (59:21). The biblical vision is that the church is an uncontainable power for world renewal.

3 Messages to hear.

A. Reflect the light of Jesus: God has made his light to shine into our hearts (2 Corinthians 4:6). **'You are the light...a city on a hill'** (Matthew 5:14). The light of Jesus is better and stronger. *'In him was life and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it'* (John 1:4-5). Darkness seeks to resist light but the Light of Jesus **repels** the darkness. The light that shines farthest will first shine brightest at home.

B. Reach the world for Jesus: Light also **attracts**. In Isaiah 60:3-14 we see God's exiled people return with the nations. Not only Jacob's repentant descendants (59:20), but also people from the 'seas' (60:5), deserts (60:6-7), and islands (60:9). All kinds of people: 'sons daughters' (60:4); 'foreigners' 60:10; and all classes of people: 'kings' (60:11) and the 'least' (60:22) will bring gifts (60: 5, 9, 11) in worship (60: 6-7, 9, 13) of Jesus. The future people of faith is a multinational community (60:16). The Church is a community on mission for God.

C. Remain the home of Jesus: *'Who are these that fly along like clouds, like doves to their nests? Surely the islands look to me; in the lead are the ships of Tarshish, bringing your children from afar'* (60:8-9). Birds building nests and ships heading home to port symbolize a prodigal people heading home to God who is our peace, salvation, and praise (60:17-18). People are not free but frightened - fugitives running in alienation from God. The only safe way to run from God is to run to God – run home to his never-ending light and life (60:19-20). ***'I am the LORD; in its time I will do this swiftly'*** (60:22). This is God's slow-swift work. As we worship and witness, may we have this vision of the future and become this kind of church!