

**NORTH BALWYN UNITING CHURCH
SPECIAL CHURCH ANNIVERSARY
SUNDAY 11 DECEMBER 2011
Rev. Anneke Oppewal
Isaiah 61:1-4,8-11; Psalm 126; John 1:6-8,19-28**

“The Lord’s Anointed”

**70th Anniversary of Trinity Church
60th Anniversary of St Aidan's Church**

(130 years of Christian witness in North Balwyn)

Before we start, a deceptively simple question. In the text we just read from Isaiah, who do you think is the Lord’s anointed?

Is it Jesus? Is it the prophet Isaiah? Or is there one or more others this term could be referring to?

It is most probable that the writer of the third volume in the trilogy we know as the book Isaiah referred to himself when he wrote the words “The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me”, rather than to someone who appears on the scene some 600 years later.

He was a prophet, and rather than the fortune or future tellers they have sometimes been made out to be, prophets were first and foremost people who brought the future into the present by applying God’s truth and promises to it.

The background against which this particular text was written is of a people recently returned from exile to find their home country in ruins. People who were waiting for the rest of their families and friends to be set free and join them in the after-exile effort to rebuild their homes and their cities. People whose parents had wept and longed for the Zion full of lush gardens and vineyards full of sweet fruit they remembered; but they found devastation and ruins instead.

Zion was not what they had hoped for and they needed all the encouragement and support a prophet can give.

Now listen to what he tells them:

*The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;
to provide for those who mourn in Zion — to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.*

They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.

*They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.*

*Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines;
but you shall be called priests of the Lord, you shall be named ministers of our God;
you shall enjoy the wealth of the nations, and in their riches you shall glory.*

Listening to these words it is hard not to feel the power they must have held for those people, over 2500 years ago.

Here is one of the great prophets of Israel, anointed by the Spirit, speaking powerful words of hope into a desperate situation and proclaiming God's faithfulness where it must have been questioned. Words that were so powerful that they kept echoing down the ages.

About 500 years later these words are applied to the person of Jesus Christ. Most probably after Jesus' death, by his disciples. Or, also possible, by Jesus to himself during his lifetime.

Here is another anointed of the Lord God, another person on whom the spirit of God clearly rests, who has come to bring good news to the oppressed, healing to the broken hearted, liberty to the captives and release to prisoners.

Here is another who speaks hope and new life into a context of despair and the ruins of broken dreams. Here is another whose whole being exults the Lord God. It is easy to see why those words were associated with Jesus. He lived them, he breathed them, every step of his life and ministry!

But does it stop there?

I have read these words to people in distress. People who had lost a loved one, people who were suffering from depression, people who were struggling to leave a situation of abuse, people trying to find their way out of an unhappy marriage.

I've read them myself when I felt down-hearted or dispirited. And more often than not they have the most remarkable effect of bringing hope and peace, healing and joy in a situation not even remotely like the situation those returned captives from exile were in, or the situation of early Christians in first century Palestine.

Somehow they work. Miracles.

Because they are words in which God is AT work.

"The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me...." Reading those words I wondered: Can I say that? The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, the Lord has anointed me? Or should I, for that part of the text, hide behind the person of Jesus as THE anointed, THE person on whom the spirit rested more than on any other person?

On our baptismal forms it says we are anointed with the Holy Spirit at baptism. During the *epiclesis*, when we celebrate communion, we pray for the Holy Spirit to come down. On the elements, but also on ourselves, as the body and blood of Jesus Christ. And in that sense we all are, as baptised members and partakers of the body of Christ, anointed and blessed with the spirit.

Called to bring good news to the oppressed, healing to the broken-hearted and release to the captives like the prophet and like Jesus who has done so before us. Called to speak words of hope, words of comfort and encouragement into our own world, a world as much in ruins as the 5th century BCE world of Isaiah the prophet and the 1st century CE world of Jesus of Nazareth.

We are called to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in the wilderness of our world, to the brokenhearted and the captives, to the oppressed and the desperate with as much power and conviction as Isaiah did 2500 years ago, and Jesus 500 years later.

We are to let the powerful words of scripture speak to us and take them to heart so they can guide and heal us to become people empowered to witness to the truth of those words.

To become people who, like the prophets of old, bring these ancient words, these ancient promises, to bear on the present in our own lives and in those of others. From our spot in the wilderness of our world in our time we are to be a voice that cries out and says: "Make straight the way of the Lord" and to witness to the light.

Today we celebrate that that witness has been happening in our community for many, many years.

A community that has had many "bloodlines" flowing into it from the beginning. Methodists and Presbyterians and Congregationalists who came to this area and found the courage to build new churches and communities. But also others who joined in with them, from other Christian traditions and denominations as well as others.

Children have grown up, while some of those who were here at the start have died. The world changed, as did North Balwyn. The Church changed, although perhaps not quite as much. Faith and witness grew, evolved and was transformed through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Christ has made his presence felt in North Balwyn, in the lives of individual people as well as in the life of his body, the Church. And we can be proud of that and grateful for all the blessings it has brought. 60, 70 years, or 130 years of combined witness. When you think of it in the larger scheme of things it is only a tiny part of that long journey of God with his people.

Even 2500 years ago when Isaiah brought his people hope and comfort, the beginnings of the history of God's people were further back than anyone could remember. Maybe 4500 years when the first parts of our scriptures were written down.

We are part of that river of comfort, hope, peace and joy that has been flowing out into the world and is flowing out into the world up until the present day. The words of faith that were written down are our words. The witness of people of faith through the ages to the comfort, support and guidance they contain are also our witness, our faith, our comfort, our support and our guidance.

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon us. The Lord has anointed us. He has sent us to bring good news to the oppressed and to bind up the broken hearted. We are the same as all the many people who have gone before us, in our own time, in our own way, in our own context.

60 and 70 years ago that context was different to what it is today. The call was to build a community where there was none; to bring people together and create something new. Some of you will still feel your heart fill with nostalgia thinking back to that time, and to what came after: large crowds in Church and Sunday School, blooming Youth Groups, young families working together. There are a lot of good memories. There is a lot to be grateful for looking back over all the years. A massive amount of Christian Witness and service to be remembered and to be grateful for today.

Some of us, however, remembering all that past glory may feel a bit like the people returning to Zion in Isaiah's time though. How much of the dream, how much of those booming and blooming Christian Communities is left?

One of our Churches has closed and our age profile is worrying to say the least. All too often we feel like a lone voice crying in the wilderness when it comes to our witness. And when we testify to the light, it feels like not too many people are interested in the good news we have to offer.

Scripture tells us that it has never been any different: not in Isaiah's time, not in John's time, not in Jesus' time, not at any time.

There has always been wilderness and devastation, sadness and captivity, hearts that needed binding up, mourners who needed comforting. And every time there have been people inspired by the Spirit, anointed with God's power to bring words of healing and comfort, of peace and love.

In every time there have been people who were prepared to open their hearts to those words to let them work in and through them. And in every time those words and those people have made a difference.

Sometimes in massive numbers and to the glorious triumph of popular acclaim, but more often than not, as lone voices crying in the wilderness, stubbornly testifying to the light the world would not want to know.

Does the Church in North Balwyn have another 60, 70 or 130 years of witness in front of it? We don't know. In the end that is up to God and where the Spirit will want to take it. Who knows? We may be on the threshold of a massive revival. Or we may be in for more slow but steady decline.

It is, ultimately, not up to us. What is up to us is to rejoice in the Lord and exult in our God, to praise God for what God has given and to trust that God will continue to be present, whatever happens, wherever people take up the call to live out the good news and be inspired and guided by God's Word. Amen.

**Giving thanks for the history of 130 years
of combined Christian Witness in North Balwyn
Trinity and St. Aidan's
now
North Balwyn Uniting Church**

TRINITY

It is with joy and thanksgiving that we celebrate today the 70th anniversary of the founding of the North Balwyn Methodist Church.

In February 1940, the founding Trustees of the North Balwyn Methodist Church (as part of the Canterbury Circuit) set about responding to the local needs for a Methodist Church. The Foundation stone was laid on 30 August and the church opened on Advent Sunday, 30th November 1941 when Rev. Eric Nye was Superintendent of the Canterbury Circuit.

With two services each Sunday the initial congregation quickly set about forming a Ladies Guild, Choir, and Sunday school all in the first month. A young Peoples Fellowship was formed in 1942 and a branch of Women's Auxiliary for Overseas Missions followed.

Other groups involving the church membership were :- younger women's Friendship Group and NBM Cricket Club in 1949, Boys Club and Netball Club in 1954. The Sunday school grew from 111 in June 1950, to 264 by the end of 1953, and to over 500 after the Youth Centre opened in 1956. With this extra space, a Girl's Gym club was formed. Without a community centre available for teenage girls, the Rays Club was reformed in 1961 and met on Friday nights. That year the NBM Football team joined the competition. The newer church was opened in 1962 to continue the tradition of service to such a large congregation. After church union, the two congregations set up the Unicare community centre, and also formed the joint Ladies Fellowship which continues a strong bond within the newly combined congregations.

We honour the dedicated ministers who over the last 70 years have lead the former Methodist flock, nurtured them, inspired them and proclaimed the Christian Gospel.

1941 – 1942 Rev. Eric Nye
1942 – 1945 Rev. Horton H. Williams
1946 – 1947 Rev. William H. Guard
1947 – 1948 Rev. Raymond C. Mclean
1949 – 1953 Rev. Ernest G. Lechte
1954 – 1961 Rev. Harry G. Mackay
1962 – 1968 Rev. Alfred E. Mckay
1969 – 1973 Rev. C. Bruce Richards
1974 – 1983 Rev. N. Eric Derbyshire
1984 – 1989 Rev. Robert W. Gribben
1990 – 1997 Rev. Peter D. Blackwood
1997 – 2002 Rev. Randall Prior
2003 – 2010 Rev. Dr Paul Tonson

Not listed here are the retired ministers and Ministers in Association who not only worshipped as part of the congregation but provided pastoral service and assisted the Minister of the day. The councils of the Congregation and the Minister have benefited from their experience and wise

counsel. We are glad that a few descendants of those who tirelessly worked for the ongoing development of Trinity are able to celebrate this anniversary.

Hugo Goetze

ST AIDAN'S

It is with joy and thanksgiving that we celebrate today the 60th anniversary of the founding of St Aidan's Presbyterian Church.

Today's congregation is the beneficiary of the faith and inspiration of a small group of laymen who gathered together in a private home to explore the possibility of bringing together a community of like minded people who wanted to worship and witness their faith in the Presbyterian tradition.

They were aided and supported by Ministers of the faith, who brought their unique talents and experiences to build what became St Aidan's Presbyterian Church in North Balwyn.

From a private home to the old Church on the corner of Tormey and Chelmsford Streets to the present building in Duggan Street, the church is one of significant importance in our community. The present building was dedicated to St Aidan, a saintly missionary who carried on the work of St Columba who organised his community to send out people to spread the Christian faith.

We remember today the Ministers who have been called and followed in his footsteps. Ministers who have served the congregation of St Aidan's and honour them for their thoughtful and searching interpretation of the Christian message.

1951 - 52 Rev. Keith McC. Dowding

1952 - 53 Rev. Hamilton W. J. Aikin

1953 Rev. John Armour

1953 - 55 Rev. Hamilton W. J. Aikin and Rev. F. W. Cunningham

1955 - 66 Rev. L. O. C. (Bill) White

1967 - 69 Rev. Gordon F.G. Kerry

1969 - 74 Rev. Maxwell J. L. Griffiths MBE

1974 - 77 Rev. Sydney S. Smale

1977 - 86 Rev. Neil E. Key

1988 - 98 Rev. Ravanel N. Weinman

2000 - 09 Rev. Dr. Lorraine J. Parkinson

2010 - Rev. Anneke Oppewal

We also remember today those Ministers within the congregation who have given of their time and friendship in pastoral service; and importantly those families, some of whom, and whose descendants, are with us today for their sense of purpose, and for initiative and energy they engendered to found the Presbyterian Church of St Aidan in North Balwyn 60 years ago.

Enid Williamson

The members of the former Trinity Church and former St. Aidan's Church join as the whole congregation of the North Balwyn Uniting Church to give thanks for the faithful work of those who

founded and nurtured the body of Christ through their faith and witness.

**We the members of the UC in North Balwyn pay tribute today
to those who founded Trinity Methodist church 70 years ago and
St Aidan's Presbyterian church 60 years ago.**

**Their vision and faith led to the development of two vibrant congregations
providing not only centres of worship but also centres of community growth.**

**We pledge ourselves today to build on the traditions of the past and
to go forward in faith looking for new ways to serve God in this place.**

George McLean
