**Trauma, Hope and Isaiah**
Sermon by Silvia Purdie
for St Ronans Eastbourne, November 2025

**Isaiah 65:17-25**
(also ref. Isaiah 12:1-6)

**No more shall the sound of weeping be heard,**
**or the cry of distress.**

Our Bible reading today is one of the grandest, most wonderful, positive promises in our scriptures – indeed, of all writing in human history. These final glorious chapters of Isaiah build up, up, into the greatest hope ever articulated, of new heavens and a new earth, in which pain is no more, conflict is no more.
And how different this vision is to what Isaiah and his people experienced every day. As he writes this the current reality is

- as he writes in the previous chapter:

**Your sacred cities have become a wasteland;**
**Jerusalem a desolation.**
**All that we treasured lies in ruins.**

Isaiah is a long song about the people crying out and God coming near. With the suffering servant joining in their suffering. And ultimately shines bright hope of a whole new reality.
As Christians we believe that the vision of Isaiah has been both fulfilled and not fulfilled. Yes, fulfilled in the coming of Jesus, and enacted through his death and resurrection. And, yet, still to come in the 'one day' hope of much more yet to come. Theologians call this 'partially realised eschatology'. Isaiah 65 is true in two very different ways both at the same time
first, that because of Jesus we do have access to the salvation and the song of Isaiah's promise. We can indeed know, within the limits and complications of human life, the experience of being created as a joy, of being a delight, seeing ourselves in God's eyes. We can indeed know true healing. Joy is a real possibility, even in the presence of suffering.

And second, because of Jesus we can entrust our ultimate destiny to God, not just of our individual souls beyond death, but the entire planet. All things created by God will be redeemed by God. This is our hope, a true and living hope, that enables a starting point of trust and an endpoint of trust and in the middle, in the messiness of everyday challenges, we can release our anxieties into a bigger vision, bigger hands than ours.

This 'partially realised eschatology' is the basis for a Christian understanding of mental health.
God has embarked me off on a new project, and God is bringing amazing people into my life who are also on this very same project – which is to articulate a faithful wise Christian response to the complex and growing catastrophe of mental illness.

All across the world, human mental health is getting worse overall. More people are living with anxiety and depression. More people feel isolated and lonely. Stress levels just rise and rise, together with addictions, violence in the home, hoarding, self harm and a host of other ways that people express their distress.
It's downright depressing just thinking about it!

Why? Despite all the incredible resources of technology and interconnection, despite our relative affluence and comfort, despite being able to buy anything you could possibly want on Temu and despite having unimaginable volumes of information at our fingertips. Somehow all of that has not moved us towards Isaiah's vision of a new earth in which the cry of distress is no longer heard.
It really is quite sad, when you think about it.
I wonder how you start to answer that 'why' question.

Of course God is calling us into a faithful intelligent active response to mental health in our time. That's what God always does, in every era – raise up and equip his people for loving hopeful mission.

I'm happy to talk more about this. I can run an evening or afternoon session in Eastbourne if you like. Let's start, this morning, with how Isaiah 65 illustrates the promise of God's blessing. When Isaiah pictures a people restored through the action and hearing and blessing of God, what does he see in his mind's eye?
The first thing he pictures is people building a house and living in it.
Very practical. My son is a builder, so he would appreciate this. Chris and I have been blessed to build a house and live in it, so I very much appreciate how much of a blessing that it. Our eldest son and his partner are excited to see the foundation being laid for their new home in Melbourne.
But the point is not just the building. From a mental health perspective the point is about safety. Being well is being safe. Trauma is the experience of threat.

Let's start with a very basic equation.
Feeling under threat leads to the experience of stress which feels most unpleasant. Threat comes in lots of forms, from the extremes of violence and war through to the being unfriended by someone on Facebook. Adverse events come as loss, change, injury and broken relationships. The more adverse events that children experience, the greater their vulnerability to physical and mental illness.
Think back on a time when you felt big and uncomfortable emotions. I expect those times in your life were impacted by adverse events. For me, the most difficult time for me in recent years, when I suffered from ongoing intense anxiety, was after I had resigned from a ministry role, had to leave a home I loved, to live in a new place, without any kids living with us for the first time. Oh, and it was a pandemic lockdown. Multiple changes, multiple difficult events became almost too much for me to deal with.

But of course it is not as simple as stressful events equals bad mental health. If it was we would all be entirely victims in life, tossed and turned by good or bad fortune.
How we deal with difficult events in life is profoundly shaped by the sources of safety in our lives.

This is why stable homes are so important, because for children, and adults, having a safe place to rest is vital for our mental wellbeing.
And we need safe people in our lives – God has made us for love, for community and family. Isaiah's vision of blessing is not at all for individuals. It is for a people, intergenerational people who belong to one another and who share homes and a future.
An important protective factor against overwhelm is our capacity to achieve things, our confidence in our own agency. Isaiah describes this as

**my chosen shall enjoy the work of their hands for a long time.**

But the most important source of safety and resilience, according to the Bible, is of course God himself.
Our fundamental sense of wellbeing is in God, because he delights in us … it is the deep reality of knowing we are loved, treasured. It is a lived experience of intimate relationship with the maker of the universe, as Isaiah puts it:

**24 Before they call I will answer,**
**while they are still speaking I will hear.**

Back in that Covid lockdown year, I did recover from anxiety. I experienced these four things: a safe secure home, support from loving people including my wonderful husband, a sense of agency as I completed post graduate study and embarked on a book writing project or two, and I also knew and trusted God, and was able to hold on to him and accept that 'this too will pass', that my uncomfortable emotions were moving through me.

So, a Christian understanding of mental health includes three main categories:
On this side are all the hard stuff of life … all the death and disease and family breakdown and work pressure and global conflict and global warming and all the things that make life in 2025 tough.
On the other side are all our emotional responses … the feelings of anger & frustration, fear & anxiety, loss & grief, sadness & depression, and just sheer exhaustion.
And in the middle are all the things that create safety, support resilience, build capacity and enable us to keep calm and carry on.
The call for the church, obviously, is to be there in the middle. God is there, through his Spirit, alive in the world, pouring out peace and love and hope.
And we the church are there, caring for people, being safe spaces for people, listening well to people, showing kindness and building community.

It has always been that way, all through human history. This is nothing new. The prophetic Isaiah saw vividly the pain and struggle of his people, and, inspired by Wairua Tapu, spoke words to them of hope and the intimate tender care of God for them and their descendants.

The apostle Paul described it this way:

God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness,"[a] made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from

God and not from us. [8] We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed;
perplexed, but not in despair;[9] persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not
destroyed.

2 Corinthians 4, 6-9

I wonder how you experience this in your own life.
Let's pause a moment to consider these three aspects of your life.
On one hand we have the sources of stress. What adverse events are you dealing with?
Let's take this moment in quiet to make a list, between you and God. Imagine yourself writing each bullet point. List them, one after the other, all the things that cause you worry and grief and frustration, both personal and global.
..
Now please finish up your list. I'm sure there's more you could keep adding. That's enough for now.
Please put your feet on the floor and take a breath. Feel your breath coming in more fully. Fill your lungs, and breathe all the way out. Do that a couple of times.
And maybe roll your shoulders a little, try turning your head as you breathe nice and deep.

Now I ask you, what are the feelings you notice inside of yourself, as you think of all the concerns, losses and stresses waiting for you out there? Right here and now you are safe, with friends, in God's presence, so let's just be aware of how feel in your body – where is there pain or tension … and in your heart, your chest … in your gut … in your head. Let all the various sensations be like colours or patterns.

…
Thank you, loving God, for each person here and all the things they are facing and all the ways they are feeling. We honour all this rich texture of life.

And now, the middle section. Now as you breathe push your feet into the floor and wriggle your toes. And now please gently move your arms and stretch your fingers. Rest your hands open, upturned.
Here is space for gratitude for all the ways that God shows his love for you. Through the house you live in. Through this house. Through the people who care about you. Through the agency and capacity you have to work and get things done. Through your heart of compassion. Through belonging. And through God's own tender touch and listening ear, come close to resource you with peace and joy.
Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Wairua Tapu. Thank you, creator God.

With Isaiah we say
**[2] Surely God is my salvation;**
**I will trust, and will not be afraid,**
**for the Lord God is my strength and my song;**
**he has become my salvation.**
**[3] With joy I draw water from the wells of salvation.**

This is my understanding of trauma and mental health from a Biblical Christian point of view. I'm really happy to share more, attempt to answer the questions that you have. It is a complex field, but I also think it is quite simple really.
I am passionate about ordinary everyday Christians feeling confident to support others through emotional distress, and trusting in the power of listening well, even when we don't have solutions to problems. In fact, pastoral care is really not about problem solving at all. It's about being there, as Christ is there with us.

Isaiah 65:17-25

See! I am about to create new heavens and a new earth -
**the former things shall not come to mind.**
[18] But be glad and rejoice for ever
**in what I am creating;**
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
**and its people as a delight.**
[19] I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
**and delight in my people.**
No more shall the sound of weeping be heard,
**or the cry of distress.**
[20] No more shall there be in it an infant who lives just a few days,
**or an old person who does not live out a lifetime.**
[21] They shall build houses and inhabit them;
**they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.**
[22] They shall not build and another inhabit;
**they shall not plant and another eat;**
for like the years of a tree will be the years of my people,
**my chosen shall enjoy the work of their hands for a long time.**
[23] They will not labour in vain,
**or bear children destined to misfortune;**
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—
**they and their descendants.**
[24] Before they call I will answer,
**while they are still speaking I will hear.**
[25] The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
**the lion shall eat straw like the ox;**
but the serpent—it will eat dust!
**They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain,**
**says the Lord.**