

Having just celebrated St David's day on Friday, I can't get away without talking a little bit about Wales. I grew up in South Wales, near a town called Llandeilo, In Carmarthenshire.

Carmarthenshire is one of the Heartlands of Welsh history and Culture: it's the land of castles and rolling hills, of Merlin and Dragons, of bards, poetry and songs.

And in a funny way, for many people's it's the heart of a kind of lost Wales that no longer quite exists: the Wales of their grandparents and great grandparents.

And being the language of bards and poets, Welsh has a word for this feeling of longing for

something which you've lost:

*hiraeth*.

*Hiraeth* is one of those words that you can't quite translate into English. it means longing for something or missing something, which you never quite had.

It's used in poetry for people who could never marry because they were always pining after that first love which they'd lost. It's used, most of all, for Wales itself, longing for the land of your fathers when you are far away, but all the time longing for something which no longer quite exists.

*hiraeth* talks of the deepest parts of you, that have their roots in the thing you are missing. It's like a kind of lost Garden of Eden, where if only you could find your way back everything would be in its right place.

I think we all have these moments of longing after something. Whether it's our homeland, or past relationships, whether its memories or lost chances.

Isaiah in our Old Testament Reading is talking to the people of Israel as they are stuck in Babylon.

The Babylonians, the great Empire, have conquered the people of Israel and their lands, and taken masses of people away to the captial, and these ancient Israelites longed to return to their home -

I think we all probably know the song based on the psalms 'by the rivers of Babylon, as we lay down, oh how we wept, when we remembered Zion.'

And in this passage Isaiah responds to their longing for

home - he tells them there is a time they will return to their land, and on their way back, the mountains and the hills will burst into song, and the trees and the fields of the field will welcome them home clapping.

And he goes further - he tells them their land will be like a kind of new garden of Eden, it will be made perfect - instead of thorns will grow Cyprus and instead of thickets there will be myrtle. It will be paraidse

They are promised what they're longing for - for a perfect home which never quite existed. And true enough, they do return home, but it's instead of returning home to a new Eden, they soon discover it's the same broken society, where wars and hunger and injustice still exist.

This is where the longing for a messiah comes from - someone will come who will restore things to how they should be, a new paradise.

As Christians, we believe that Jesus was this Messiah. It's at the heart of our faith - that Jesus destroys death and brings us new life, that through him we can be at one with God again, that the kingdom of God is here and present and real and everything is changed.

But there is a problem. We're not back in Eden. We just have to look around us to see that.

There's this deep contradiction, that in all Jesus did everything is changed forever, but that all the problems of the world remain.

And it's a question that I think Jesus goes some ways to answering in our gospel reading today.

He tells us: 'There is no sound tree that produces rotten fruit, nor again a rotten tree that produces sound fruit. For every tree can be told by its own fruit: people do not pick figs from thorns, nor gather grapes from brambles.

A good man draws what is good from the store of goodness in his heart; a bad man draws what is bad from the store of badness. For a man's words flow out of what fills his heart.'

What Jesus is saying if we long for a different world, we can't

just look back to a dream age - that it starts with us producing good fruit. You have to draw out goodness from what is in your heart and recognise those darker places that need healing.

We can, as Jesus tells us, look inside ourselves and see where there is hatred and evil. We can see what rotten fruit we are producing. And we can draw on the deep wells of love that God has placed in our hearts.

We might sometimes long for a return to the garden of Eden where, like Isaiah said there are no more thorns or brambles, where God has fixed everything: But we are still human. We still have free will. We still have to make choices.

Instead Jesus tells us the kingdom of God has come into the

world - and it's our job to take the splinter out of our eyes and see the world as it is, and see our role in it.

The thing is, in the garden of Eden, we were like children: once we had eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, we became adults, and we could never quite go back there. And while we might long for this perfect homeland, we forget that we are here and now in this world, in this time, in this place.

It's by turning out attention to the present that we can play our part in creating a new Eden here and now.

There is no going back, but there is the opportunity to create a world of justice and peace. And it starts with us.

Lent begins on Wednesday, and lent is the time we especially put aside time to reflect on what's in our hearts.

It's a time for looking inside and finding those places of hatred and pride, of anger and sin, where we might want to ask God's healing in our lives and in our relationships.

And in this, we have an opportunity to take those things out of our eyes which stop us from seeing clearly, and to dig deep in our hearts, and to create in them lives that can make a world of justice and peace and wholeness a reality here and now.  
Amen