

26 Pentecost Yr C, 13/11/2016
Isa 65:17-25
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“New heavens, a new earth, and a new Jerusalem”

What happens to you when you have gone through a difficult time of hardship and suffering? When you fail at something and that changes your life in a way that you don't like, how does that make you feel? What do you need to move ahead into a hopeful future?

In our passage from Isaiah, the prophet addressed questions like this to the people of Judah and Jerusalem, who had recently arrived back home in the promised land after living in Babylonian exile. When the people returned to their homeland and to Jerusalem, they had to rebuild their country and city again. In this time, they were still feeling down in the dumps, nothing was the same as it had been before their time in Babylonian exile. Moreover, many of them were still likely struggling with their bad memories and experiences of living in exile.

Deep inside, they were longing for a time and place “where there was nothing to hide and nothing to hide from... a place where nothing had ever been broken, where there were no chips or dents or scars, a place where everything was still whole and holy and pleasing to God.”¹ We too, like the people of Judah and Jerusalem, also long for such a time and place. I think deep inside you and I, and everyone longs for a return back to that perfect state of existence in Eden before the Fall. We long for that perfect time and place because we are created in the image of God, and we want to live in full communion with God without sin and evil getting in the way and leading us off in the opposite direction.

I love today's passage from Isaiah because I believe it is a vision from God given to the prophet, which is Gospel, Good News, news bursting with joy and hope, peace and love! So let's take a look at what the prophet is showing us here.

In verse 17, the prophet starts off his Good News message by saying that God is about to create new heavens and a new earth. The new heavens and new earth shall change the nature of existence right now in that former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. In other words God will bring healing to his people who are haunted and oppressed by their tragic memories—memories that are so full of brokenness, chips, dents and scars shall no longer exist. Such memories shall be healed and removed, wiped out, gone forever, no more to return. The people, including you and I, shall be freed from such memories.

Along with the healing and removal of such memories is a word of joy. The prophet instructs his people and us to rejoice in the new Jerusalem that God is about to create. God is going to delight in this new city of Jerusalem and delight in his people—including you and I. Why such joy? Well, the prophet says that along with the healing and removal of past memories there will no longer be sounds of weeping or cries of distress.

In the new Jerusalem no longer shall children be afflicted with illnesses that claim their lives too soon; no longer shall mothers give birth to babies that will die shortly after they are born. In the new Jerusalem, there shall be joyful sounds of laughter and play—the children shall be full of energy, life, health and well-being. Furthermore, the prophet says that even senior citizens shall enjoy life in their old age. They shall live and thrive; they shall enjoy a long and fulfilling life.

The prophet continues this Gospel, Good News message by saying that the people of Jerusalem shall find meaning and get pleasure from their work. They shall get to see the fruits of their labours. No longer shall superpower bullies like the Babylonians come to occupy or destroy their homes. No longer shall some enemy come and overpower them. No longer shall an enemy steal or destroy their vineyards. The people shall get to live in their new homes; and they shall enjoy the fruit from their vineyards that produce bumper crops. There shall be perfect justice in that everyone will be looked after—no

more homeless, hungry and thirsty people. Everyone shall have a decent place to live, and more than enough to eat and drink.

God doesn't stop with his blessings there however. Speaking his Gospel, Good News message through the prophet, God promises the people of Jerusalem and us the channel of communication between God and God's people is wide open. God promises that even before folks call on God they shall receive God's answer; before you and I can finish our sentences God will hear us. In other words, our prayers are going to be answered even before we speak and while we are praying God will hear and understand us completely. WOW! What a blessing that shall be! In part, I think some of you already may have heard from God in this way. Perhaps you've had an inkling of what you were going to pray about and before you know it, that inkling has become a reality. Jesus has promised us that as our mediator before God's throne of grace; he will hear and answer our prayers. Moreover, Jesus also promised that by giving us the Holy Spirit our prayers will be prayed even when we are unable to verbalize them. That's Good News, because, I don't know if you're like me; I'd much sooner have the Holy Spirit pray for me than praying for something I have no business praying for! So yes, what the prophet envisioned centuries ago has at least in part become a reality for us.

The vision doesn't end there however. In the last verse we have a beautiful vision of God's perfect peace-God's *shalom*. God is going to act in such a powerful way that our present-day world full of sin, evil and violence is going to end. Our present-day upside down world is going to be turned right-side up! A predator animal like the wolf that loves to kill and eat a helpless lamb for dinner will, in God's peace-filled world, eat together with the lamb. Lambs and wolves will live in perfect peace. The present-day meat-eating lion will, in God's perfect peaceful world, eat straw like an ox. No longer shall humans or other creatures be afraid of poisonous snakes. They shall feed on the dust of the earth.

God's holy mountain, Zion, the new Jerusalem shall be a place where no one is hurt or destroyed. Rather, we shall all live under the peace-filled reign of God. As people of God this is our Good News, Gospel message. A message of hope for us today, tomorrow, and forever. A message that, by God's grace, is to be lived and shared with everyone in the world. Amen.

1 Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cowley Publications, Inc., 1993), p. 170.