Sermon, Nov 13, 2022

**Isaiah 65:17-25**

**The Glorious New Creation**

17For I am about to create new heavens
    and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
    or come to mind.
18But be glad and rejoice forever
    in what I am creating,
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy
    and its people as a delight.
19I will rejoice in Jerusalem
    and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it
    or the cry of distress.
20No more shall there be in it
    an infant who lives but a few days
    or an old person who does not live out a lifetime,
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
    and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.
21They shall build houses and inhabit them;
    they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
22They shall not build and another inhabit;
    they shall not plant and another eat,
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
    and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
23They shall not labor in vain
    or bear children for calamity,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isa+65%3A17-25%2C+Mal+4%3A1-2%2C+2+Thess+3%3A6-13%2C+Luke+21%3A5-19&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-18921a)]
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—
    and their descendants as well.
24Before they call I will answer,
    while they are yet speaking I will hear.
25The wolf and the lamb shall feed together;
    the lion shall eat straw like the ox,
    but the serpent—its food shall be dust!
They shall not hurt or destroy
    on all my holy mountain,
            says the Lord.

**Isaiah 12**

You will say on that day:
“I will give thanks to you, O Lord,
    for though you were angry with me,
your anger turned away,
    and you comforted me.

2Surely God is my salvation;
    I will trust and will not be afraid,
for the Lord[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isa+12&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-17903a)] is my strength and my might;
    he has become my salvation.”

3With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. 4And you will say on that day:

“Give thanks to the Lord;
    call on his name;
make known his deeds among the nations;
    proclaim that his name is exalted.

5Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously;
    let this be known in all the earth.
6Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isa+12&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-17907b)] Zion,
    for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”

**Luke 21:6-19**

When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, 6“As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.”

7They asked him, “Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?” 8And he said, “Beware that you are not led astray, for many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isa+65%3A17-25%2C+Mal+4%3A1-2%2C+2+Thess+3%3A6-13%2C+Luke+21%3A5-19&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-25826a)] and, ‘The time is near!’[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isa+65%3A17-25%2C+Mal+4%3A1-2%2C+2+Thess+3%3A6-13%2C+Luke+21%3A5-19&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-25826b)] Do not go after them.

9“When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified, for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.” 10Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; 11there will be great earthquakes and in various places famines and plagues, and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.

12“But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. 13This will give you an opportunity to testify. 14So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance, 15for I will give you words[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isa+65%3A17-25%2C+Mal+4%3A1-2%2C+2+Thess+3%3A6-13%2C+Luke+21%3A5-19&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-25833c)] and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. 16You will be betrayed even by parents and siblings, by relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. 17You will be hated by all because of my name. 18But not a hair of your head will perish. 19By your endurance you will gain your souls.

The promise of Isaiah 65 is that God is doing a new thing. There will be a new creation: a new heaven and a new earth. In this new creation things are going to be much different. “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox.” No longer will we witness nation against nation, race against race, or see one religion pitted against another as we experience this new world. Everyone is going to get along in what has been called “The Peaceable Kingdom.” And the warmth and joy found in these verses stands in sharp contrast to our Gospel reading about the destruction of the temple and the end times, where Jesus speaks of wars and insurrections, *“Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; 11there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.”* [pause] Which of these descriptions sounds more like the world we live in today? If we took a vote, I’m pretty sure you would say the verses in Luke more closely resemble the world we live in, with little hope that it will change for the better soon. But we are not without hope. If my summer sabbatical revealed anything it was how much beauty exists in this world and we should not take that lightly. The process of life, death, and resurrection is going on around us all the time if we take just a moment to look.

Prior to our reading this morning, Luke tells of Jesus teaching in the temple, and the religious leaders trying to entrap him into saying something worthy of arrest and punishable by death. Having successfully rebutted their three attempts, Jesus now shares about the difficult days that lie ahead. As he stands in the magnificent temple, he foretells of its destruction, something his audience must have been stunned by. If what scholars suggest is true, that Luke wrote these words after the temple had been destroyed in 70 C.E., then Luke may have been reassuring his readers that this catastrophe was not the end of God’s people, but rather a new beginning; the beginning of a new way of being God’s people. And although we may wonder why it is taking so long for God to remake creation, it is not our part to speculate on God’s timetable. And here’s something that struck me. It’s also possible this “remaking” of heaven and earth is already happening. Maybe this world doesn’t need to be further destroyed in order for God’s Peaceable Kingdom to exist.

This week I received a copy of the book, *All Creation Waits, The Advent Mystery of New Beginnings*, by Gayle Boss. It’s written like an Advent calendar with each day being a different animal. The author describes how that animal adapts to the cold of winter in the Northern Hemisphere, and then how it is renewed and reborn in the spring. The animals vary from hibernating bears and turtles, to birds, rabbits, snakes, and fish. The introduction begins with a quote by German theologian Meister Eckhart: *“Every single creature is full of God and is a book about God. Every creature is a word of God. If I spend enough time with the tiniest creature, even a caterpillar, I would never have to prepare a sermon. So full of God is every creature.”* One of the chapters is about the common chickadee—a frequent visitor to our feeders every day. They always flit about and look so joyful, at least from my perspective inside a warm, dry house. The truth is, those playful, happy birds walk a tightrope between life and death every day. Half an ounce of feather, flesh, and hollow bone—if you held one in your hand it would equate to the weight of two nickels. A chickadee loses heat quickly, so the tiny bird must eat constantly during winter’s short days to keep its metabolism high enough to survive the cold overnight hours. Even then, sometimes it’s not enough. In sub-freezing temperatures, the bird will find a hole in a tree, or a place in thick underbrush, but as the night goes on, it burns through all it’s calories, so at first light, it must find more food and quickly. Something I never knew is that a Chickadee will store seeds and grain in multiple places within the ½ square mile range it calls home. As it does so, the hippocampus of its brain expands so the bird remembers precisely where those seed caches are. As summer progresses into fall and fall to winter, the bird’s memory center expands to its largest size as this seed-map expands. Then, as it eats through the reserves over the winter, the hippocampus will shrink. [P] Isn’t that fascinating? How this relates to today’s message I haven’t a clue, other than it’s further evidence of God’s magnificent creation and all the countless ways we are linked together. It might also make you want to go home and put out a birdfeeder.

Whether or not God’s new creation is still in the future or has already begun through the first coming of Christ, I believe we have been born into this time and place for a purpose. What is that purpose? I believe God gives us pointers through the written word. One of our lectionary readings for today comes from Thessalonians 3:6-13 (which wasn’t read) and in it, we get a clue as to what God expects of us during our life on earth. In this letter, Paul is writing to the church at Thessalonica. It was one of the first churches Paul helped to establish, and the Thessalonians have become confused about the second coming of Christ. In Paul's first letter to them, they understood him to say that the end of all things was imminent, therefore, some people threw in the towel, quit their jobs, and lived it up. Paul corrected this misunderstanding in a second letter to them. "No," he said, "don't give up; live life for the long haul. Don't grow tired of doing good." We can compare this to Jesus’s statement from Luke: *“By your endurance you will gain your souls.”* Enduring in our efforts to "do good" was part of the message Paul passed on to all the churches he visited. Regardless of whether we’re being offered the nightmare of catastrophes that Luke describes, or Isaiah’s dream of a new creation, we are pointed to what is beyond the present. What is now is not what God will bring then. So, we are to hope, wait, and endure. [P] So much of the Bible’s message is exactly this—hope, wait, endure. And like the passages we’ve read today, our reality is based on this interplay between hope and suffering, and not unexpectedly, we struggle with that.

Paul alludes to this conflict raging both around and within us in his letter to the Ephesians when he writes, *“For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”* In creating the world, God confronted those forces of evil and prevailed, but I believe the battle still rages, and the forces of evil are still contending for rule over us and the world. Even amid the persecutions, difficulties, and pain of the battle we can be confident because, in the teaching of Jesus, we know who wins this war. Jesus’ words in Luke 21 were not intended to frighten us, but rather reassure us, and give us hope, even though the struggles and pain will still exist, at least for a time. Paul describes our current situation further in the book of Romans, *“We know that the whole creation is groaning together and suffering labor pains up until now. And it’s not only the creation. We ourselves who have the Spirit as the first crop of the harvest also groan inside as we wait to be adopted and for our bodies to be set free. (Romans 8:22-23).”*

But there is more in today’s scripture that gives me even greater hope. Look again at Luke 21:14-15 which says: “*14So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; 15for I will give you wordsand a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.”* This passage comes right after Jesus tells them of how they will be persecuted and taken before kings and governors and asked to testify. Not preparing for something runs counter to what life has taught us doesn’t it? Be prepared! Don’t leave things to chance! Make sure you’ve done your homework! I’d say these wise words are still accurate; we should do our very best to prepare, but in these verses, we learn something very encouraging, that God is with us. We don’t stand alone. Jesus assures us of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, even in our darkest moments. Christ-followers can combine both realism and hope, honesty about the pain of the present age, and yet confidence in the ultimate fulfillment of God’s will for a new creation.

In addition, I think one of the most important things we can do as Christ-followers is to help one another see and sense God’s presence in this world. Father Henri Nouwen described our mission on earth as helping people discover where God is at work in their lives. Here is what he said:

*“We have to learn how to think about the events of the day that take place in our community or in our larger world, and to see them as ways to come to know God in new ways. There is the spiritual life and the political world and the economic world (and I would add “the natural world as well), but somehow, we must really believe that God is a God of history who works in the events of the day. . . . It is important that you learn to read the newspaper with a heart that sees God at work among his people and to be aware of the great struggle in which you are involved—struggles with the power of evil and the hidden love of God. God is present, but you have to be in touch with that very reality. . . . The world and the reality of daily events are there to be read with the mind and heart of God.”*

 I don’t know about you, but I take comfort in the knowledge that God is at work in this world. And like Jesus, we are commissioned to do God’s work, to resist oppression and evil, to show love and justice, and to witness to the work and word of Jesus Christ as best as we are able. These are the very words we speak in our Baptismal vows. We must not lose hope, and learning about the hippocampus of a Chickadee helps me do that. Furthermore, this future creation invites us to be agents for that in which we hope. Speaker and author, Pastor Bruce Epperly writes this: *“Yes, God is at work in the world, but God needs our creative companionship. We need to be on God’s side, not be seduced by the limited visions of nationalism, ethnocentrism, or economic security. We need to dream and then act toward the world God imagines, a world almost impossible to visualize but our only hope for the future: long life, security, happy homes, fruitful vineyards and gardens, laughing children, and peace among opponents. But, more importantly, peoples’ hearts will return to God, enabling God to speak within them. ~~They~~ [We] will experience the divine vision for humankind and Jerusalem and [we] will respond affirmatively, fulfilling ~~their~~ [our] role as God’s companions in healing the earth.”*

 This week marks the 26th week after Pentecost. We also refer to it as Ordinary time. Twenty-six weeks is half of the entire year. Our liturgical calendar is quickly coming to an end. Next week will be “Christ the King” Sunday or “Reign of Christ” Sunday, whichever you prefer, and then the new liturgical year will begin with the first Sunday in Advent. There are four Sunday’s in Advent and then Christmas will arrive—this year on a Sunday. Advent is a time of waiting—waiting patiently for the birth of the Christ child, but also waiting for Christ’s return. Waiting doesn’t mean inactivity, however. Our waiting is an active waiting as we seek to partner with Christ and bringing light and love into this world now. So let’s be about it now.