

Isaiah 65:17-25 ~ Luke 21:5-19

Making Way for Your New Creation

November 17, 2019 ~ 23rd Sunday after Pentecost ~ Sacrament of Baptism

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Introduction to Gospel Reading:

Today, both scriptures lessons again, land us among the distraught, disoriented, discouraged people of Judah, first in what we call 3rd Isaiah (that Jeremy read). This beautiful vision of God's glorious new creation was written about 475 BCE, two generations after Judah's return from the utter and complete devastation of the Babylonian Exile. In Luke 21, our second lesson you are about to hear, *Jesus* has already made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem for the last time. His disciples know something is about to go down. Jesus has been talking about it since Luke 9:51. In today's story, Jesus is teaching in the Temple, a place where he belongs *and* a place where he is most unwelcome because he dares to challenge its corruption and pretentiousness. He is teaching in the Temple, knowing he will end up on a cross by week's end. *Luke's Gospel*, wasn't written down until about two generations after Jesus' death and resurrection, most likely after Jerusalem's destruction in 70 CE. All of these words were written for distraught, disoriented, discouraged people of faith. People wondering, "now what?"

As I read this text, listen for how Jesus responds to the disciples' anxious "when" and "what" questions. He doesn't answer those questions directly. Instead he responds with something far greater. He tells them *how to respond*: in the midst of calamity. He tells them how to look up and keep their eyes on the bigger picture, and how to keep making way for the new creation envisioned by Isaiah and embodied by Christ. I invite you to listen for Jesus' words of instruction and encouragement, forever relevant and forever new.

Sermon:

"Dax David, child of the covenant, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own, forever." What does that really mean for him? And for us? We all made promises to God and to him a few minutes ago: His parents, his sponsors, our children, and our congregation. As I suggested to the children, being baptized with water is something like getting a Holy Spirit tattoo. Water, something we can feel and touch, something we depend upon for life, something common and every day becomes sacred and eternal. Yes: being baptized connects Dax and all of us who participate in that baptism, into the Holy Spirit realm that transcends all time, and all places. All creation: heaven and earth. And God is smiling.

This glorious new creation, where there is joy, health, long life. Rather than an economy of extraction and exploitation, there is a new economy of abundance. Labor is honored and there is meaningful work for all. This is a world where children are safe and secure. It's not just about people. We see in Isaiah's vision all creation is in harmony: plants, animals, people. Power imbalances, like the difference between wolves and lambs come together without fear. Did you notice that this glorious new creation is *even better than the Garden of Eden* was? In this new creation: The serpent has no power, "its food shall be dust." Love reigns and evil is vanquished.

At this point, you may be thinking, “but Pastor have you even watched *any* news this week? Do you follow *anyone’s* Twitter feeds, or noticed *any* of the memes gallivanting across the internet? Memes that mesmerize and menace us? Get your head out of the Bible and look around. Our world looks nothing like what you are talking about. Get real.” My message today is a simple one. And it has to do with what’s real and what’s fake. With what is forever and what is not. Here it is: the love and mercy of God. Yes: the love and mercy of God *for all of God’s creation*. Let me break this down a little.

Let’s be honest: Don’t you get tired of your “monkey” mind? I certainly get weary of mine. No disrespect to monkeys, our not so distant relatives. But I think you know what I mean by our “monkey mind.” It’s actually a Buddhist term meaning unsettled, restless, confused, indecisive. As a Christian this monkey mind (which tends to overthink or overreact) can invade our best intentions, when we forget Paul’s invitation (Philippians 2:5) to, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” The mind of Christ, unlike our monkey mind, opens up for us the peace the world cannot give, the peace that passes understanding. The mind of Christ gives us the capacity to fear not, instead to trust God and to testify! Even when it seems like all our temples (whatever they may be for us) are crumbling, and those things we thought were as solid as stone start to be thrown down. Yes, you can trade your busy “monkey” mind for the mind of Christ.

“Sometimes I believe that heaven is just a new pair of glasses.” This was said by Father Ed Dowling, a Jesuit priest who helped Bill Wilson found Alcoholics Anonymous about 80 years ago. I love this metaphor. When we are baptized, we are given that new pair of glasses. I like to picture every baby we baptize with a tiny set of glasses. But more seriously, if you think about it, glasses or contact lenses are something we choose to put on, or not, every day. In Christ we are given a new and different lens through which we see ourselves, others, and this world that Christ came to save.

But how often do we remember to put them on? If we forget that there is always more to every person than meets the eye. If we get caught up in the need to know and to control the “when” and the “what,” that’s a pretty good sign we forgot to put our baptism glasses on. If we fail to do our best to see what we are doing to our delicate ecosystem, or to all the earth’s displaced and destitute people trying to live on it the same as we are: those glasses are not on our noses. Another thing about those glasses is how to push us to keep looking up and out. They help us gain the all-important perspective that keeps our “monkey” minds at bay.

Yet when we manage to look up and out, I know it can be daunting. Especially when you chase problems upstream and see the systemic problems like racism. It is natural to ask, how can I or any one person really make a difference? Let Greta Thunberg be your answer to that question. Consider the difference that 16 year-old Greta Thunberg, from Sweden, has already made in calling us all to step up and link arms as co-inhabitants of our one, beautiful, small, and warming planet. How can we dare not to?. Her address to the United Nations Climate Summit in September had the ring of a prophet’s harangue. Being so young, from Sweden, and on the

Autism spectrum, we listen to her differently. On the Ellen DeGeneres show, Ellen asked her what she meant when she said the being on the Autism Spectrum was a gift. Greta explained that since the people in power are not taking this seriously or truly addressing this crisis, “we need people who think differently” to make real progress toward solving this crisis we are already in the middle of. To those words of Greta, I say, “Amen.”

Our baptism glasses show us that difference is part of God’s plan for Creation, present and future. In the new heaven and earth, we can look for the love and mercy of God and seek ways that we share this truth across all the major religions. This fall, God has done an amazing thing. What started as an idea of Pastor Gisele Berninghaus, of Faith Lutheran and mine to organize an Interfaith Thanksgiving service that would include the three religions of the Book, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, has expanded well beyond our original vision. The service on Nov. 26 here in our sanctuary at 6:00 p.m. has widened its scope to encompass Buddhist, Hindu, and Native American traditions, as well as Roman Catholic and Mormon. Along with the original three traditions we started out with. Getting to know these religious leaders of our community in preparing for this service has been truly heavenly. Gathering us all together on Nov. 26th is another step, I believe is making way for God’s new creation. I hope you can join us.

Some of us here today love tattoos, the more tats the better. Others here may detest them. What our Bible tells us today is that this difference doesn’t matter. What we all share, what *does* matter is the mark of Baptism, the water that was or will be placed upon us that is forever. The water that says, “yes” we are God’s beloved children right now, tonight, tomorrow and forever. The water that says “Love wins” and I want to live in that light. The water that says we will do our best to put on our heavenly pair of glasses every day in order to make way for the new creation. No. we don’t have all the answers. And that’s OK. None of us does. In fact, God doesn’t give us an answer to the what and when of Christ’s second coming. Nor to the question of why there is evil in the world. *God doesn’t give us an answer, instead God gives us himself.* And that is all we need, isn’t it? Christ Jesus says, I am with you forever. Now let us get going on making way for God’s glorious new creation.