

“Disciples Take Their Faith Public” – November 17, 2019 – Isaiah 65:17-25

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In this text, the prophet Isaiah shares a beautiful vision of what God has in store for creation, for this world of ours. Indeed, it is the vision that God has had for the creation all along, and it has been a work in progress. It is more than just a vision of what could be, it is a vision of what will be. It is a glorious promise, and all of creation has been longing for it to be fulfilled.

Now, we aren't naïve. Each one of us can look around this world and easily recognize the places where creation is suffering. Just a few days ago came news of yet another shooting in a school, where children were traumatized, injured, or killed. And the debate rages on about what we can do to stop this from happening. And yet it keeps happening. We have heard about the fires they have caused massive destruction in the western United States, in Australia, in Siberia, in the Amazon. We think of places in the world that have suffered drought and other places, horrific flooding. Our news channels are full of stories about greed and violence. And we don't have to look very far to witness poverty, hunger, and homelessness.

It is a world in chaos. And we might wonder, how on earth can this get any better? The sheer magnitude of the problems that rage seemingly out of control in our world may cause us to retreat. To hunker down and hold on to the little bit of safety and security that we have. It is easier to turn off the pain of the world rather than face it dead on. For our own sanity, we turn away. That is a luxury that most of us have, and that the majority of the world does not. We have the luxury of turning away.

We hear God speak to us in this vision of Isaiah. And we wonder how all this can change. With the amount of chaos that exists, we may find it hard to grasp a different scenario, a different image. But instead of being overwhelmed by the magnitude, and this is something I have to keep reminding myself – let God worry about that, the big picture – we can turn our eyes to things that we can do.

If we really look at what the prophet is saying here, the vision that God has for the creation is really pretty simple – they are images of basic needs being fulfilled. Isaiah talks about babies surviving infancy, and adults living out many years of life – that's talking about basic healthcare – that good health should be available to all people. The vision also mentions houses being built, vineyards being planted. But not just for some people. The vision specifically negates that - it shows all people having access to houses and food – that the resources of God's creation are meant to be shared by all people. The vision also talks about meaningful work for people – not that some labor in vain only for others, not that some don't even have access to work. But that all would have fulfilling work to do.

What does it mean to have fulfilling work? Well, I think it means being able to enjoy the work that you do, and, additionally, not being overworked or underpaid and having enough time for rest. Isaiah's vision closes out with that familiar image of the peaceful kingdom – the wolf feeding alongside the lamb – not eating the lamb! And the lion eating straw like the ox. In this vision, the shedding of blood will no longer occur. There will no longer be any death or decay. And all people will be God's children, together then, we will be siblings to each other

So, what all do we have here in vision – no more tears or sadness, access to good health, housing, food and water, fair work for all, no violence or bloodshed, an end to all the things that currently keep us separate from and at odds with one another. No more haves and have-nots. It is an image of equity and justice for all people and restoration of relationship.

Like we have been reminded before, implicit in this vision is a call for God's people to be just and fair with one another. To seek to be in relationship with one another. To care for one another and build up those who have been neglected and marginalized. This vision that Isaiah has of the glorious new creation is not of some far off or distant event. God's work of redeeming creation is and has been an ongoing process. And friends, we have been called to be a part of that process.

We Presbyterians have always been leaders in acts of social justice and working toward making changes in the world where the need for change exists. Historically the Presbyterians have taken seriously the call of Jesus Christ to care for those in need, to speak out on behalf of those whose voices have been silenced, and to make a stand for justice in the face of injustice, and to put resources to work for the good of others.

Everything we do, every act of kindness, every work toward equality is a part of the realization of God's vision for the new creation. We are not to sit complacently by in the face of the chaos of the world around us or to turn away, throwing our hands up in frustration. To be followers of Christ means to wade out into the middle of the chaos and go about the good work that he has called us to do. We don't do this work alone. We are a miniscule but important part of God's greater good to make the vision of Isaiah a reality. Let us not shy away from that which God calls us to do. Let us live out our faith in this community, in our nation, throughout the world, sharing the love of Christ with all.