

“Be Glad and Rejoice Forever in What I Am Creating”

Isaiah 65: 17-25

I’m going to do something that is a little out of the ordinary for me. Usually I don’t talk politics in the pulpit. I strive to honor the starting point of faith for us as Disciples which is we are People of the Table and all are Welcome. It doesn’t matter if you are Republican or Democrat, Liberal or Conservative, all are welcome. As Disciples of Christ, we hold as our center that all are God’s Beloved children, made in the image of God. This has been and always continues to be my starting point for my faith and for my preaching.

But recently I have been feeling the need to say something about all the stuff that’s going on surrounding this election. So after much prayer and thought, I have decided to endorse a candidate.

Yes, I know. I know. I may be jeopardizing our whole 501-c3 thing with this endorsement. But I just can’t help it. This is too important. I feel too strongly about this. I cannot let it go unsaid. This Tuesday as you enter the voting booth to cast your vote, a vote that will affect the next four years of this country, I hope you will remember that no matter what, the candidate to put your trust in, to put your faith in, the one candidate who can and will truly bring change to our world is...Our God. What did you think I was going to say someone else?

What I want us to do today and all days is remember that elections come and go, kingdoms rise and fall, but our God's faithfulness to God's people always, always remains the same.

I say these words as much for you as I say them for me. Because recently I have been feeling anxious. I can feel myself becoming more and more worried, more and more troubled over stuff which I have no control. Recently all the uncertainty about the future has become too much for me, and I can feel my spirit starting to slip into the darkness. I can see my light of love starting to go dim. As the anxiety of the world changes from a trickle to a roar, I can feel myself wondering, "How long O God must we wait for your Kingdom to be here on earth as it is in heaven?"

With all this anxiety surrounding me, it wasn't until I sat down to prepare this sermon that I realized I had lost my focus, meaning that in looking at and experiencing the world around me, I had narrowed my vision down instead of enlarging it to capture the expansive vision of God at work in our world here and now.

Let me explain:

I want us all to take a look at how our text for today actually begins. It starts with the words: "For I am about to create a new heaven and a new earth; former

things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating.”

Isaiah writes down these words thousands of years ago for a troubled and difficult time in Israel’s history. But as we read them in worship today, it is almost like Isaiah wrote them for us. There are so many similarities in what he was experiencing then and what we are experiencing now.

Very much like the Israelites at the time, tension and anxiety have become our daily bread. Uncertainty about the future clouds our vision and we are becoming more and more troubled, wondering where God is in the mix.

I want to give us a little back ground on our text to help us understand why I chose these very words for us today.

You see, during the time in which Isaiah is writing, many Judeans had returned from exile. The Temple had been rebuilt but still the people were uncertain about their future. There was anxiety and many people were wondering when God would make good on all the promises the prophets gave to them upon their return. A few positive things were happening for the community, for the nation but on the whole, things were not going so great. As they looked around, the people began to wonder how long they had to wait until God’s Kingdom was fulfilled here on earth.

And so Isaiah gives them these words, these words of hope, these words of vision. Upon recognizing the people's uncertainty about the future and experiencing the people's anxiety, Isaiah shares these words, words that call for a transformation of the people's understanding of God's plan for humankind.

However, the thing we need to realize is that although Isaiah writes these words down, God is the one speaking them. God is the one saying these words of healing and wholeness to the people of God.

Through these very words, God is reminding the people that there is our time which is limited, measured in seconds and minutes compared to God's time which is infinite, measured in centuries and millennia. A year in our time is just a blink of the eye for God.

Once they remembered this, everything would change. Their perspective would be broadened. Their view of God at work in their world would expand. They would be able to see the larger dimension of God's plan for humankind, a plan that restored the people of God, a plan that would reconcile and bring wholeness to all of God's creation. They needed to understand that God had not failed them before and God certainly wasn't about to start now.

Let's be honest...when the people returned from exile, they expected immediate results. They expected an immediate return to their former glory. But

they had forgotten that this time of former glory wasn't all sunshine and roses and it certainly didn't happen overnight. It took years and years for Israel to form as a nation. It took years and years for them to come together as a community. It had also been a time that was full of peril. It had been full of corrupt kings and queens. It had been full of enemies invading. Even in their most idyllic memories, the people had somehow forgotten that there had been poverty and death in their world, things that brought darkness to dwell amidst their community, things that added to the people's anxiety and uncertainty about their future.

But with a few words, God changes all that. God expands their limited vision to see beyond themselves, to see and realize that God had not forgotten them or forsaken them. Through these words of healing and love, God is telling the people, "Don't settle for wanting the former things. Hope for God's Kingdom to come. And in doing so, practice compassion. Practice justice. Practice loving kindness so that the way of life yields peace and security for all.

God is telling the people, "I've got something better in mind for you. I'm creating a new heaven and a new earth, a place that goes back to the beginning, goes back to Eden. And in this place, in this time, there will be no more weeping. There will be no more sorrow. There will be no more despair.

This wasn't something that would happen in some distant future light years away. It was a promise for the people of God for the here and now. The promise was the same as it had been since the beginning of time. Everything would be okay. We may not know when. We may not know where. We may not even know how. But what we do know is that God is in the process and all things will ultimately achieve the destiny of healing and wholeness for which God intends.

God wants the people of Israel to hear these words, God wants us to hear these words and know that in times of anxiety, in times of worry, even in the most difficult and troubling time, for God to be the God of love and hope that we know and have experienced God to be, it is not enough for God to simply comfort our broken and trouble souls. For God to be the God of love, the God of hope, the God of peace that we know and have experienced God to be, In this time and in this place, in all times and in all places, God must and is making all things new!

We can never ever forget that God is at work in our world. The promise we have from our God since the beginning of time is that God will continue to do what God has always done: God will create a world of beauty for the people of God. God will constantly remind us of God's love, a love which knows no end. And God will always, always be at work to set us free from what binds us and confines us in the darkness, never forgetting us, never forsaking us.

That's one of the reasons for our All Saints Day celebration...to shift our very understanding of time. On this day, we celebrate, we remember, we give thanks that we are not in this faith thing all on our own. As the people of God, we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, men and women who have walked this journey of faith long before us. As people of faith, we know that the story of God is still being written. God is not done. God is not finished. We are connected to a long line of people, people who have walked, who continue to walk and who will walk this journey of faith, people who celebrate all that God is doing in our world now and forever more. And through it all, past, present, future, God's faithfulness to God's people has always and will always remain the same. God's word of love will always remain our center. God's words of hope and peace drives out and will continue to drive out the darkness. God's very presence comforts us and inspires the light of hope to burn bright in our hearts now and forevermore. With these things leading us, guiding us, comforting us, surrounding us, we find the courage and the strength to bring healing and wholeness to all of God's creation.

For us as people of faith, in remembering and naming the cloud of witnesses, the vision of God's Kingdom expands and becomes one step closer to being fulfilled here on earth as it is in heaven. In remembering the difference between our time and God's time, the promise of healing and wholeness takes one step closer to becoming a reality for all of God's creation, a creation where there will be

no more weeping, a creation where sorrow will be no more, a creation where the lion and the lamb will lie down together, a creation where even the elephant and the donkey will put aside arguments and ideologies and break bread with one another.

God is at work in our world, just like God has always been...changing, transforming the profane, transforming the despair, transforming the uncertainty and anxiety into a holy space, into a holy experience where we are all once again made secure in the promises of God.

What I love about All Saints Day is if we listen very carefully, we can almost hear those who have gone on before us, hear the ones who will come after us, whispering to us, saying, “Be Still. Watch and Listen. Know that you are the result of the love of thousands. Hold onto this love. Let it guide you. Let it lead you. Let it always always remind you that our God is at work in this world, creating something new. Just you wait and see.”

So this Tuesday, and all the days that follow...hear these words. Know that we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, men and women who have seen change in this world, changes that continue to boggle our mind, and yet still the promise to them remained the same. They knew that elections come and go, Kingdoms rise and fall, But God’s faithfulness to God’s people always always remains the same.

So today and all days may we listen to the saints and hear the promises of new life and love they offer, listening as they remind us that no matter what, we are the result of a love of thousands and that this love will always always have the last word. Amen.