

September 26, 2021

**“Finding Our Hope Again”
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake**

Isaiah 65:17-25

*For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.*

*But 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.*

*I 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.*

*No more shall there be in it
an infant that 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.*

*They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.*

*They 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.*

*They shall not labor in vain,
or bear children for calamity; [a]
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—
and their descendants as well.*

*Before they call I will answer,
while they are yet speaking I will hear.*

*The 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.*

Sermon “Finding Our Hope Again”

I had the strangest thing pop into my mind from 1984 when I read this scripture; for I am about to create a new heaven and a new Earth and the former things shall not be remembered nor come to mind. The image I got was the second Star Trek Movie “The Wrath of Khan”. Yes I was quite the Trekkie. In the movie scientists had created a new terraforming device aptly called “Genesis”. If you launched it at a barren planet, all the sudden you would have a remade planet to match the likes of the Garden of Eden, making all planets habitable by humans.

Unfortunately though, Khan, played by Ricardo Montalban employed the use of mind control ear slugs to capture the device to use on already existing planets thus creating a new Earth but wiping out all the life that already existed there. Well, of course Capt. Kirk and the crew of the Enterprise save the universe though Spock makes the ultimate sacrifice to do so in this movie. Saying while he is dying, “because the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the one”. Boy would Spock’s logical mind explode if he saw what was going on in our world right now.

I found this so odd that I would think of this but in a way this passage is talking about a new earth and all the former things passing away. It’s almost as if Isaiah is saying that God would really like a do-over. That our creator figured out all the things that went wrong with humanity and wants to fix it with an upgrade. Humanity 2.0. You can tell what Isaiah thinks went wrong by what he says God would do right on this second attempt. Things like making humans more peace loving, and meeting everyone’s basic needs. Putting an end to weeping and misery and make sure no one dies young.

This is hard to ponder that our Creator might not get it right the first time. Reminds me of when Jesus heals the blind man, remember this. He lays his hand on his eyes, takes them away and then asks what the blind man sees and he says through blurry eyes “I see trees walking”, so Jesus spits on his hands again and does it and gets it right on the second time and the blind man’s vision is restored.

It makes us uncomfortable to think that God might have messed up the first time. Scriptural literalists and misogynists might say it wasn’t God— it was because Eve ate the apple that creation became flawed. But seriously, at some point we have to stop blaming everything on our mothers and take ownership of our own future.

Nevertheless we can not get away from the fact that we are flawed in many ways and we are certainly in need of a makeover. But I would like to keep a lot of what is in this world, my good memories, my family, roses, ice cream and sunsets. I don't want to forget all the former things, but I do think we can do a heck of a lot better laying out a vision of our future. A future that we can find hope in. A future our Lord will be proud of.

I have to admit that in the last 18 months or so there have been times where I really thought I had given up on humanity. I was beginning to let myself think that we were too flawed for redeeming, not in the next life but in this one. I don't need to go into why because you all have been there right beside me, seeing the same suffering, witnessing the same ridiculousness, feeling the same hopelessness.

But even in the darkest times, what kept me going, what kept me from giving up hope was that I knew in my heart that God wouldn't give up on us, God couldn't because you can't give up on your own children. Those of you that are parents or have loved a child like your own, you know what I mean, even when they go down dark paths and become completely self absorbed you always have that spark of hope that they might turn it around somehow.

God lives with that spark of hope for us, that hope that we will make things right, that those good things that God put into us, like intelligence, compassion, ingenuity, empathy and above all love would finally kick in in us and all would be well. But here we are though, still feeling the losses of this horrific pandemic, and we are still fighting with one another over some of the stupidest things I have ever seen, completely wasting valuable resources and energy, humans are still destroying our planet and it feels like hate is ruling the Earth.

If there was a time to drop a Genesis bomb this would be it, but that isn't who our God is. God keeps giving and forgiving, loving, believing, and abiding with us. Urging us through Jesus's message of love to do the right thing, to love our neighbor, to care about others as much as ourselves. Wanting us to live like Jesus and Spock, to put the needs of the many over the needs of the one.

When we have no hope, ask God to give you a little, a little that God has in abundance. One of the ways that I cultivate hope in myself is to make a plan that gives me joy and then when I get down I think about that plan. Like right now after a really hard couple of weeks of vertigo and loss, I just kept thinking about our plan to go to Door County for the first time and see the leaves turn and how grateful I feel that my church made that happen. When I get down about the approaching winter and how a girl who grew up in Oklahoma and Texas ended up in such a cold place, I think instead about our kids coming for Christmas, how beautiful the snow is, about fires, and hot cocoa.

We have to have an alternate vision to give us hope and Isaiah does that for us. Let's say a renewed heaven and Earth, where no one dies young, we all live to be at least a hundred. A peaceable world, so peaceful that even the wolves and lions are vegetarians now and no one is destroying our holy mountains.

This church lives by that alternate vision. Your faith is woven with the hope of the kingdom of God where all God's children are fed, and clothed and kept from harm. You continue to exist so that you can be agents of that vision of a world where love reigns supreme. We are all flawed beings, but we are brothers and sisters who work on those flaws together in order to continue to grow spiritually and continue to move toward a renewed Earth.

God is with us on this journey, God will not give up hope for us. Let's carry that divine hope wherever we go. AMEN

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"FINDING OUR HOPE AGAIN"

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 PARKSIDE COMMUNITY
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST