

Isaiah 65:17-25

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 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. 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; 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.

Luke 21:5-19

⁵When 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!' and, 'The time is near!' 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 and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, 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.

Endings and Beginnings, A Sermon on Hope November 13, 2016

Joy to the World. Isaac Watts/G.F. Handel.

Joy to the Word! The Lord is come: Let earth receive her King;

Let every heart prepare Him room,

And heaven and nature sing,

And heaven and nature sing,

And heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

He rules the world with truth and grace,

And makes the nations prove

The glories of His righteousness,

And wonders of His love,

And wonders of His love,

And wonders, wonders of His Love.

I know we are a few weeks from advent and Christmas but I sing this to remind you who we belong to and who we give our hearts and allegiances to. That while we have just been put through the wringer with the most disheartening and often despicable election campaign, we need to be reminded that we belong to God and we follow the way of Jesus and we are first and foremost, His children. As I reminded you last week, we are children of the Living God and I hope you won't forget that.

We are a divided country right now and the recent election of our new president has done nothing to change that. We are those who mourn as well as those who rejoice over this event. Jesus' words in Luke certainly connect with many of us that the world is coming to some cosmic end, or some new beginning, and we are all saying, "God help us all!" I don't know if the Lectionary writers knew we would be reading these right after the election, but they certainly seem appropriate.

My children both called me after the election wanting to know what to do now? Shall we move to another country? Shall we hate all those who disagreed with us? Shall we be afraid for our children? And truthfully, I wondered the same myself. But I told them that we need to stay calm. We need to respond in love and courage. We need to continue to be children of Light in the world. That we can and should look for the many ways that we can do good for others right here in our own backyard. That we have a choice about how we will respond and Jesus calls us to testify to God's love for all people. I told them to read Psalm 146 where the psalmist says,

³*Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help. ⁴When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish. ⁵Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, ⁶who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; ⁷who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. NRSV*

Next week we will celebrate Christ the King Sunday and we will continue this discussion about who we give our allegiances to.

I reminded them of that quote attributed to John Wesley that says, "*Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.*" You have a choice about how you will respond and I certainly hope that the Love of God shapes those choices.

Elizabeth Gilbert the author of the book, "Eat, Pray, Love" shared this wonderful post on her Facebook page that I'd like to share. I've edited some of it but you can read it in its entirety on her page. She said, "Every single day, you must face whatever world you have woken up to—whatever that may be. That's the only world you get. You must start there, and you must ask yourself "Who do I want to be in this situation?" Calm. Strong. Open-hearted. Generous. Wise. Brave. Humorous. Patient. That is the only question that ever really matters.

I insist that we can learn-with practice-how to choose our emotional state in all situations. This has to be true. If this isn't true, then we are truly and thoroughly defeated-because our state of being is literally the only thing in

this world that we can control. This is not denial. This is not complacency. This is not me cheerfully saying, “Oh well! I’m sure everything will be fine!” sometimes things are not fine. Sometimes the diagnosis is terminal cancer. Sometimes the dark forces win. Sometimes the outcome is dreadful.

But all our practices in peace and grace and equanimity and courage are for TIMES LIKE THESE-for times when you do not get the outcome you want. This is when it matters. When the crap goes down, and the crap goes wrong, and the crap gets real-that’s when the crap gets interesting. That’s when the test comes. Who will you be right now? Right now. Right this moment. Because that’s the only part that is up to you. decide who you will be today Dear Ones. Right now. Decide. You can do this.”

I love this story, and our passage from Isaiah this morning affirms for me a choice to live in hope and not despair. And you can call me a “Polly Anna,” but these verses from Isaiah sound like a breath of fresh air after 580 days, or more, of the past political rhetoric. And perhaps as the dust settles over the nation and the world, we can consider what it might be like to live into the hope and delight, the new beginnings and re-creations of this passage. That we do not call to mind the destructive words and actions of the past but live into a new earth and new heaven. A new democracy and a new community which chooses to live in hope.

To build houses, to plant vineyards, to eat of their fruit, to create a world where children thrive and the elderly live well. Living lives that reflect the blessedness of God! Where protestors and security forces will have breakfast together. Where the poor and the rich will build houses together. Where political opponents will seek the good of all people. Where people, the earth, the Kingdom of God, will come before allegiance to party, tribe, or nation. What kind of world would that be? Can you imagine it? Can you see it? And can you testify to it?

That is what Jesus is asking us to do. Will you be able to speak to this vision of hope for the world, *Joy to the World*, when you are asked to? How you respond to all this difficulty in the world is important as a child of God, and it is up to us all, to respond in love and hope. Jill Duffield, pastor and editor of the Presbyterian Outlook Magazine shared this powerful thought. She said, “Now is our opportunity to speak the gospel to the brokenhearted. Now is our opportunity to speak the truth in love. Now is our opportunity to let the world know we are Christ’s disciples by our love for one another in a very unloving and too often unlovely world. Now is our opportunity to testify to the power of Jesus Christ to reconcile and forgive, to transform and redeem.

Consider all the tumult, the war, the earthquakes, the suffering and the cruelty. Does not God have a Word to say in the midst of it? Have we not been given a purpose to fulfill in the face of it? Are we not to be a light to the world? Didn’t Jesus ask, “Do you love me?” “Yes, Lord, you know that we love you.” “Tend my sheep.” Now is our opportunity to testify.”

I suspect our new president will have a lot to learn about himself and others as he walks into this role of leadership. But we need to be reminded that government doesn’t solve all our problems for us. We so often sound just like those Israelites who begged for a King. “Give us someone who will lead us and take care of us. We want to be like other nations.” Forgetting once again, that God is the King of our lives and we follow a different leader who calls us to lives of love and compassion even when things don’t turn out the way we want. That doesn’t mean we aren’t Americans or patriotic or political. But it does mean we give our allegiance to God first and all others second and I assume that is why you are here this morning.

There will be many in our world that will need our help these next few days, weeks, and years. There will be many who will be at risk and vulnerable, and the call of Jesus is to stand with and for them, in love. This will be a challenge for us and we will be pulled in many different directions if we are not centered in Christ’s love; if we are not rooted in Hope rather than despair.

The day after the election Mrs. Nagy posted this note for her first-grade class. It said, “Good Moring First Graders, as many of you have probably heard, we have a new president of our country. The president makes big decisions for our country. But YOU get to make big decisions as well. Choose to be kind to people. Choose to do the right thing. Choose to love the things that make us all different and special. You don’t have to be a grown up to help make our country a better place.” Love, Mrs. Nagy. She sounds like a wise teacher.

Who will we be, in-the-midst of all this? I hope we will be able to say that we were:

Calm.

Loving.

Courageous.

Accepting

Strong.

Generous.

Humorous.

Patient.

And Faithful.

(Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus, Charles Wesley/Rowland Prichard)

Born Thy people to deliver,

Born a child and yet a King,

Born to reign in us forever,

Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thine own eternal Sprit

Rule in all our hearts alone;

By Thine all sufficient merit

Raise us to Thy glorious throne. Amen.