

Scripture:

Isaiah 65:17-25

“The new reality in Jesus Christ.”

The Good News of Jesus Christ is all about a completely new reality.

New reference points --- new co-ordinates ---- new fulcrum.

It's about the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God.

It's about the old has passing away and everything becoming new.

“See I will create new heavens and a new earth.” --- Isaiah speaks in our reading today.

And Isaiah goes on to describe a bit about what this new reality will look like ---- including some very familiar phrasing.

Picking it up at verse 25 ----

“The wolf and the lamb will feed together,
And the lion will eat straw like the ox,
And dust will be the serpent's food.
They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain.”

And of course we also find these words in Isaiah 11 ----- the well known passage we often hear in Advent as we prepare for the arrival of Jesus Christ.

Picking it up at verse 6 from Isaiah 11 --- we'll hear the entire passage in a couple of weeks ---- but for today the last few verses.

“The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them.
The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.

The infant will play near the cobra's den,
 and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.
 They will neither harm nor destroy
 on all my holy mountain..."

A foretaste --- a vision ---- of the new reality in Christ.

A precursor of what is to come.

In Advent ---- starting 2 weeks from today ---- we begin to prepare for the arrival of Jesus Christ --- God stepping down into His creation and beginning His great rescue plan.

And today --- Isaiah's passage ----- with its borrowing from an Advent passage ----- provides us with the opportunity to prepare for the time of preparation.

And in truth we need all the time we can get to prepare for the new reality in Jesus Christ precisely because it is so radical and transformative.

And not only is it radical and transformative in its nature --- but it is counter virtually all that we see and experience here on earth.

Intellectually it's almost impossible to imagine a lion eating straw.

Intellectually it's almost impossible to imagine wolves and lambs feeding together side by side.

Intellectually and experientially it's very difficult to envision a young child putting their hands into viper's nest or playing near a cobra's den as a desirable or peaceful kind of image.

And so intellectually and experientially it can be a challenge to envision the complete re-ordering of things.

This passage with all of its talk of a new heaven and a new earth is all about promise and invitation.

The promise of what is to come and an invitation to both imagine it and live into it --- participate in its establishment and coming to life.

In giving us a glimpse into what God longs for and has in store the prophet invites us to partner with God in working for God's great and wonderful Shalom for the whole creation.

And Shalom ----- the Hebrew concept of peace ---- is a deep and profound concept.

Shalom is where everything is as God intends it to be.

Shalom is the new heaven and the new earth.

Shalom is the new reality come to life fully in Jesus Christ.

Shalom is where there will be no harm --- no destruction --- and no death.

Shalom is where all of life is just as God intends it to be.

Shalom is the defiant affirmation that nothing can --- or will ---- thwart the fulfillment of God's will and purpose.

And so the very thought of Shalom ---- engenders a powerful sense of hope.

The vision that Isaiah paints ----- the vision that God's love in Jesus Christ gives to us ---- is not based on rational criteria.

The goals and outcomes of this new heaven and new earth ---- are not humanly attainable ----- they can only ever come as a gift from God.

It will take divine intervention for the new heaven and the new earth to be established.

The new heaven and new earth --- will never come by extra hard or extra special human effort alone.

And this is precisely why all efforts and movements that lack Jesus Christ can never and will never achieve or even approximate the Shalom that is the kingdom of God.

And it is only when we are fully grounded in the sovereignty of God and the love of Christ ---- that this vision seems plausible.

Those who don't know Jesus will never understand the full truth of this beautiful vision precisely because without Him it's not at all possible.

Without Jesus the place Isaiah speaks about today this is just a far fetched ---
- fairly tale kind of place.

Where there is no harm --- destruction ---- or death.

Where lions eat straw and wolves and lambs eat side by side and the wolf doesn't just turn and gobble up the lamb.

Where children don't die young and people live out their lives fully ----
never succumbing to premature death.

To believe in these kinds of things requires eyes and hearts of faith.

No one would ever posit the possibility that one day they will wake up in a world where lions will eat straw instead of meat --- where wolves will stop eating lambs --- where children will never die young and adults will only ever live their life to the fullest --- unless they first have faith.

Without a profound sense of faith and hope and trust in the God who said these things will be so ----- they're impossible to imagine --- and absurd even to many.

The life intended by God for His creation is not something we can simply envision rationally --- we need faith --- and hope ----- and trust in God to see into this new reality.

And make no mistake about it ----- these words of Isaiah ---- this pictorial description of the new heaven and new earth --- with eternal safety ---- peace and plenty ----- come in a time of great disease and discomfort.

It's not easy for the people to see this picture clearly.

Isaiah recalls some of the most heartbreaking things that plague humankind and foster the greatest sorrow and despair ----- infant mortality and premature death.

Picking it up at verse 20 -----

“Never again will there be in it
an infant who lives but a few days,
or an old man who does not live out his years...”

If we think about what haunts us the most --- what causes the greatest pain and sorrow in life --- these are it --- children dying young and people’s lives being cut short prematurely.

Other than maybe Donald Trump actually becoming president of the United States ---- what’s more horrifying than dead children and premature death for people.

But seriously what is more horrifying than dead children and human life suddenly cut short --- premature death young or old.

The sudden death of a child or a shortened life of an adult will always catch our attention and cause us to stop for a minute --- it bothers us --- it saddens us --- surely these aren’t what God intended.

And they aren’t --- God’s Shalom --- is a whole different reality.

In the new heaven and the new earth --- physical death is just a passage from life to life.

Shalom --- the defiant affirmation that nothing will thwart the fulfillment of God’s will and purpose engenders ---- a great and profound sense of hope.

As Christians we need to hope and believe ---- testify --- bear witness to the fact that

--- relationships will be mended

--- jobs will be found

--- wars will cease

--- food and shelter will be made available to all

---- abuse --- violence and hatred will one day stop.

And our hope for these things cannot ever be placed in political systems or human ingenuity ----- because if so we will continually be let down and disappointed.

Instead we have to ground our hope in divine intervention.

When hope is grounded in the gospel it becomes persistent ---- enduring --- and resilient ---- it becomes expectant that things will actually change one day and be made better --- holy and true.

When we share a vision of the kingdom of God with someone ---- a pictorial vision perhaps like what Isaiah does --- where life is celebrated and upheld -- -- where harm and hatred and destruction are things of the past.

When we share this and people shake their heads and say things like --- “I just can’t imagine it.” ----- or ---- “It all seems very nice but I just can’t see it.”

It is precisely because they only ever see with earthly eyes ---- with the eyes of humanity --- human experience only ----- and not also eyes of faith ---- and hope and trust.

Eyes that also see into the defiant affirmation that nothing will ever thwart the fulfillment of God’s will.

It is only after we experience Jesus Christ for all He is that our eyes of faith are opened and we see the possibility of Shalom ---- things as God intends them to be.

We can’t ever see things with the defiant affirmation that nothing will or ever can ultimately thwart the fulfillment of God’s will ----- until we first have an eye opening encounter with Jesus Christ.

Strictly human eyes cannot see the Kingdom of God --- and strictly human hands cannot usher in the Kingdom of God.

We can’t work at it so hard ----- or make ourselves so much better such that we can establish all that God intends for us ----- it can’ be done by us ----- we literally need divine intervention.

Eradicating sin from our lives isn't about working harder ----- or being better people --- or being nicer and kinder and more gentle.

Eradicating sin --- can only ever be accomplished by Jesus Christ.

The heavenly vision of lions and calf's --- wolves and lambs ---- infants and snakes --- and cows and bears --- and so on ---- all hanging around together at peace --- safe and secure --- isn't humanly possible.

The eradication of war --- hatred --- rape ----- abuse ----- destruction and so on ----- isn't humanly possible.

These things require divine intervention.

And today the prophet recalls some of the things that cause perennial problems and plague humankind ----- things that foster sorrow and cause despair ---- infant mortality ---- and premature death.

With so many challenges yet unmet or resolved ----- amidst uncertainty --- suffering --- grief and pain ---- real life --- cancer --- strokes ----- premature death ----- lost pregnancies ---- Donald Trump as president.

Amidst the sometimes darkness and calamities and mysterious incomprehensibility of real life ----- Isaiah presents us with a vision of a new Jerusalem --- a new reality.

Something that gives us hope and casts all these other things into perspective.

Listen again to the vision Isaiah presents to us --- it's a pretty powerful and endearing image of Shalom ----- everything as God intends it to be.

“”See, I will create
new heavens and a new earth.
The former things will not be remembered,
nor will they come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I will create,

for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight
and its people a joy.

I will rejoice over Jerusalem
and take delight in my people;
the sound of weeping and of crying
will be heard in it no more.

“Never again will there be in it
an infant who lives but a few days,
or an old man who does not live out his years;
the one who dies at a hundred
will be thought a mere child;
the one who fails to reach a hundred
will be considered accursed.

They will build houses and dwell in them;
they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
No longer will they build houses and others live in them,
or plant and others eat.

For as the days of a tree,
so will be the days of my people;
my chosen ones will long enjoy
the work of their hands.

They will not labor in vain,
nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune;
for they will be a people blessed by the Lord,
they and their descendants with them.

Before they call I will answer;
while they are still speaking I will hear.
The wolf and the lamb will feed together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox,
and dust will be the serpent’s food.

They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,” says the Lord.”

This is the Gospel.

The former things ---- bad --- unfortunate ---- sad --- evil things will not be remembered.

The sound of weeping and crying will be heard no more.

Never again will there be an infant who only lives a few days or a man or a woman who does not live out their years.

They will not labour in vain --- nor will their children be doomed to misfortune.

Before they call I will answer.

They will neither harm nor destroy.

This is the new reality in Jesus Christ.

This is the defiant affirmation that nothing will ultimately ever thwart the fulfillment of God's will.

And because of this we live with great hope --- and confidence and peace.

The Bible is God's love letter to humanity.

And some parts of this letter remind us --- and paint beautiful pictures of peace love and harmony --- Shalom.

And the second half of Isaiah 65 is a beautiful --- peaceful picture.

If life ever gets us down --- if we ever feel like we just got winded ----- or clipped at the knees ----- we can always turn to beautiful passages like this.

Offering us great comfort --- and peace --- and hope.

God isn't finished yet.

In the end beauty wins ----- love prevails --- Jesus saves.

In the end Shalom.

God reigns --- and the Kingdom finally comes in fullness.

In the meantime ---- we wait ---- in the meantime ---- we wait upon the Lord --- and we wait upon the Lord --- and we wait upon the Lord.

Thankfully along the way --- as we wait and wait and wait ---- we also get glimpses of just how beautiful this kingdom is.

And today Isaiah gives a little glimpse of just what it looks like.

Treasure this --- hold it deep in your heart --- and never let it go --- because one day it will come in all its fullness.

Amen.