

“Look and Rejoice”
Isaiah 65:17-25
Rev. Liz Kearny
Longview Presbyterian Church
November 17th, 2019

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

18 But be glad and rejoice for ever in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a
delight.

19 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.

20 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.

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

22 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.

23 They shall not labour in vain, or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—
and their descendants as well.

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

25 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.
This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Our passage today comes to a people who are disappointed in God. God's people returned from exile and have been back in their homeland for decades now. But they aren't the same generation who saw God's mighty acts to get them home. And they haven't seen God's promises of a new future fulfilled. The homeland previous generations dreamed about returning to is not the homeland of their current reality. There's poverty. There's society dysfunction. Everything is still a mess. The amount of work to be done to rebuild the temple and the whole society is like a steep mountainside, mocking a tired people who are so disillusioned that beginning that climb feels impossible.

I wonder if you have found yourself in this middle place. Far enough away from God's mighty acts in the past that it's hard for you to remember God's faithfulness. Disillusioned enough in what is happening in your personal life, your family, your community, your country that pessimism has taken hold in your heart.

This is yet another time in Israel's history that worshipping idols started to make comeback, when cynicism was at an all time high, and the idea of a god I can control with my own will and power starts to look better and better.

And as a fellow human, I get it. I personally tend to reach for all kinds of numbing devices and distractions that are not my God

when cynicism starts to take over my heart. It's why I finish scrolling through news stories about the latest school shooting or wildfires in California, and crawl back into bed - trusting my hideaway instead of my God for safety. It's why I drive by an encampment of folks trying to shelter themselves, and I immediately start berating myself for all the things I have not done to help - trusting first in my own weak efforts instead of looking to God for the way forward. It's why that same broken pattern pops up in my relationships, and I gossip with any friend who will listen instead asking God to help me take the first step towards healing reconciliation.

But here in our text, in a moment of clarity, cutting through our cynicism and idol-worship, God casts a vision of a new heaven and a new earth. A vision of a land free of weeping and full of folks who live with health into old age. A vision of a society where everyone has the means to have a home and actually live in it with access to good, locally grown food. A vision of a world where the wolves and lambs that have always been enemies are sharing a meal trough and the ferocious lion is filled with a peace that we have never seen in it before.

And here's what I find most compelling about God's new creation described in this passage. It comes down to one verb that is used 3 times in just those first couple verses: the verb *bara*, which is the Hebrew word for CREATE. "For I am about to create (*bara*) new heavens and a new earth... be glad and rejoice for ever in what I am creating (*bara*); for I am about to create (*bara*) Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight." What I learned this week is that the only one to enact this verb for creating in the whole of the Old Testament is God. There is not a

single usage of *bara*, CREATE in our Old Testament where God is not the subject. God is always the One who creates. Which means that it is actually not for you or me to *create* the new thing. That work belongs entirely to the God who hovered over the chaotic waters at the beginning of time to CREATE, to *bara*, with just a word. No matter how many times the idols of our lives have tried to convince us that we are on our own with an impossible mess to clean up, the truth of this text is that the act of creating new life is always God's.

This changes everything. The lie that we are alone out here trying to piece the world back together on our own strength can fall to the ground, and we can start thinking differently about our role in God's new heaven and new earth. And the text today gives us some clues about what our role is the new thing God is already creating. The Hebrew word *hinneh* doesn't show up in our translation of the text, but as I looked at the original language, I found it twice in verses 17-18. *Hinneh* is sometimes translated "Behold" and it is essentially the Hebrew word for "Look! See! Check it out! Don't miss this!" And in light of this word, verses 17-18 could read something like this: "For *hinneh* LOOK, SEE, CHECK IT OUT, DON'T MISS THIS, 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 for ever in what I am creating; for *hinneh* LOOK, SEE, CHECK IT OUT, DON'T MISS THIS, I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight."

Friends, it is God's work to create the new thing. It is our work to *hinneh*, to look, to see, to check it out, to make sure we don't miss the new thing God is doing. This might sound like a

passive activity, but it is not. We cannot truly behold the new thing unless we turn our heads and lean in to see it clearly. Every time you show up with an open heart to serve families looking for stable housing through the Family Promise program or you drive north to the prison to worship at Hagar's Community Church with women who have been incarcerated, you are *hinneh*-ing, actively looking for the new thing God is doing in those places that society long gave up hope. Every time you pick up the phone to listen intently when that grieving friend calls you, you are *hinneh*-ing, opening your ears for the new life God is raising from the ashes. And every time you tell the truth to that safe person who reached out to see how you are doing, you are *hinneh*-ing, leaning in and trusting that in spaces of vulnerability, God new creation has begun.

And when we see those little green sprouts of life springing up in the oddest of places, our text tells us to "be glad and rejoice forever in that which [God] create[s]." As Presbyterians, sometimes labeled God's "frozen chosen", we may hear the word "rejoice" as a passive verb too. But one of the Hebrew roots used here is more akin to leaping, dancing, and spinning around with uncontainable joy! That's what we are talking about here! God does the creating. We participate by *hinneh*-ing, turning to see with our own eyes what God is doing. And then we respond with *actions* rooted in joy. And this is how we get swept up in God's new creation.

Friends, as we live in this in-between place, between God's glorious deeds of the past and our longing for God's new thing to rise up, this passage gives us a way forward. Perhaps instead of looking around at all the brokenness around us and first asking,

“What am I supposed to do?”, we can begin by asking our God, the only subject of the verb “create”, “What is that *You*, Creator, are already doing? Help me to see it, to *hinneh* it, Creator God. Show me how to rejoice in it. Sweep me up in the new thing *You* are already doing.”

Your What Disciples Do journal invites you this week to take your faith public by writing to one of your local political representatives about a community issue that is important to you as a person of faith. This is because, in our text, the new thing God is creating is earthy - it looks like health and longer lives for all people. It looks like housing that helps humans flourish. It looks like food sources that nourish all people. It looks like unprecedented signs of peace between creatures that have always been at war with one another. I wonder what would happen if you wrote to your representative out of your excitement about the new life you see God creating in your community, however small that little green sprout might be. I wonder what would happen if you invited them to join you in beholding, in *hinneh*-ing, and then celebrating that new life. I wonder if the beginnings of the new earth God is creating would become clearer to you and to your political representatives as you have this conversation.

Ask God this week how you can participate in what God is already creating. Write to your political representative. And see what happens. For God is listening. As God promises us towards the end of this text, “Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking, I will hear.” God is creating something new. Will we see it? Will we rejoice? And will we be swept up in that mystery of new life? Amen.