

**Last Sunday in the Church Year: November 24, 2024**

**“Do We Dare?”**

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

It is to physically drained, emotionally deflated and spiritually hopeless people living in brutal captivity that these words were first heard, “***Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. <sup>18</sup> But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness.***”<sup>1</sup>

What we did not hear read is the first 16 verses of this chapter. In those verses, God describes a divine purging process whereby the idolators, the unbelievers are separated from the believers. After this division is made, the former troubles will be forgotten and the former things will not be remembered. God plans to re-create everything for the sake of His servants. What was old, dead, and hopeless is to be made new, alive and eternal.

Can that be right? Do we dare to dream? Do we dare to hope? Do we dare to set our sights on the promise of heavenly glories? All we know is the opposite. Isn't this all we are to expect? This is real. This is here and now. This is living in the real world and not some pipedream, some wishful fancy, some anticipated glory. I've had anticipations and aspirations before; they don't always work out. They don't go the way I want, and they don't live up to my expectations. I mean, come Isaiah, what's the deal?

Notice that God says He is creating new, not building new. He does not rebuild. He recreates. God is the only one who can create something from nothing. From nothing, all of creation is brought to existence through His own Word. By that same word, all of creation is sustained. Even when sin corrupts and man returns to dust, God restores man through His Word made flesh. Part of being created in God's image involves the use of words and communication and language. This is how God operates and gives us the ability to do the same.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 65:17–18

It is through this gift of language and words and understanding that God reveals many things to us in the Scriptures. Not every answer to every question can be found there, but what we need for salvation is there: these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ and that by believing, you may have life in His Name.

Of the many things revealed to us, the Scriptures depict the indescribable wonders of the new heavens and the new earth in various ways. Sometimes they are pictured as a new Garden of Eden. At other times it is called Paradise, our unfading inheritance, Abraham's bosom, a banquet hall, the Father's house, and the new Jerusalem. These various word pictures are used to look at the mystery of the new heavens and the new earth from different angles. None of them completely portray in perfect detail every answer to every question that we might have to what this actually looks like. They give us different ways to think about various aspects of these resurrection realities, and what a wonderful gift of God to behold.

Through Isaiah, God gives us something even better. The picture before us today is one that marks the end of mortality. Dare to imagine no more miscarriages, no more stillbirths, no more fatal accidents, or diseases of children. Imagine never again gathering at a graveside to mourn someone who, by our estimation, died too young.

Isaiah looked again and saw the new heavens and the new earth as a place marked by the end of frustration. Dare to imagine only joyous satisfaction in the gifts of God, with no theft, no deterioration, no conflict between families, among friends, and no war to rob us of the produce of our hands in God's new heavens and earth.

Isaiah kept looking and saw the new heavens and the new earth as a place marked by the end of hostility. What a strange sight to see the wolf and the lamb feeding together in peace. No more killing, No more destruction. Only perfect peace and harmony abide.

Finally, Isaiah saw the new heavens and the new earth as a place marked by the end of evil and iniquity. Dare to imagine life without temptation to sin because there is no more tempter. The old serpent, Satan, will be banished from God's new Jerusalem, which will shine like the sun on His holy mountain. Here there will be only good because we will live with God face to face.

Do we dare to imagine such a glorious place? Yes. But what about here. Those sound glorious, but what if it's not. Things might be bad here, but at least I know what it's like. What if it's not as good as it seems? I've had expectations before, and nothing so far has actually lived up to its hype.

While we have the gift of language, we don't have the perfect use of it. The failure is not in God's Word, its in our sinful nature to dismiss it, to misplace fear, and to misunderstand. We have many gifts, but better times are coming, even if we don't fully understand. Isaiah records, "***The former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.***"

How can we understand this? Jesus says, "***When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.***"<sup>2</sup>

Consider this from the baby's point of view. For the baby in the womb, life is undeniably ideal. It lives in an ideal temperature, in a shock-absorbing fluid, with a perfect flow of nourishment and waste removal. It would be hard to imagine anything better than life just there and then. But one day all that comes to a dramatic, sudden, and painful conclusion. The newborn child is in a bright, cold, harsh environment where it is forced to breathe to survive. How strange and unwelcome this must seem at the time! Yet we grow to appreciate and cherish this new world into which we were so abruptly thrust. We grow so enamored with it that it is hard to imagine there could possibly be anything better. Convinced that this life is all there is or the best there can be, many don't want to leave it any more than the baby wants to leave the familiarity of the womb.

But as surely as life outside the womb supersedes life within, God promises that life in His eternal presence will far surpass the glories of this life. St. Paul caught that hope in his letter to the Roman Christians, "***I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.***"<sup>3</sup> Luther added, "I would not give up one moment of heaven for all the joy and riches of the world, even if it lasted for thousands and thousands of years."

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<sup>2</sup> John 16:21

<sup>3</sup> Romans 8:18

Some 750 years after Isaiah, Peter wrote, “*You should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, <sup>3</sup> knowing this first of all, that mockers will come in the last days with mocking, following their own sinful desires.*”<sup>4</sup>

Today there are many who belittle our belief in new heavens and the new earth. According to them, Christians are completely out of touch with reality; their heads are so high in the clouds that their feet are no longer on earth. So, someone scoffs, “You mean you really believe all that stuff in that old book? Literally?”

Christians are made out to be the foolish prey of ecclesiastical shysters. Marx and Lenin were certain that Christianity was nothing more than the invention of the greedy rich designed to deprive the common people of a fair share of life's goods.

In the face of such ridicule, sometimes from people who seem to sound so learned and wise, our faith can wear thin. We may begin to doubt.

Take heart dear brothers and sisters in Christ. You know that God's reliable, sure Word promises you these things and He cannot go back on His word. Prophet after prophet built upon the words of God as He inspired each one to write for you to know, for you to believe that Jesus is the Christ and that by believing, you may have eternal life. You know that the new heavens and the new earth are yours, the resurrection to eternal life is yours, because you have been united with Christ. Both His death and His resurrection are yours. And He is here, right now, for you.

Jesus Himself, God's incarnate Word, His word in the flesh, assures you of this reality. On the night in which He was betrayed, knowing what awaited Himself and His disciples, He used words and communicated many things. Not pipedreams, but realities grounded in Himself, “*Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. <sup>2</sup> In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. <sup>4</sup> And you know the way to where I am going.*”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> 2 Peter 3:2–3

<sup>5</sup> John 14:1–4

What is that way? Jesus says, ***“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”***<sup>6</sup>

You are recreated in Christ Jesus through Holy Baptism. Isaiah speaks clearly, ***“He [that is the Christ] was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.”***<sup>7</sup>

Jesus earned forgiveness for each one of you by dying on Calvary's cross. He paid the penalty of sin's curse. To all who trust in His merits and His death, to those who have faith, God your Father promises an eternal place of joy that is beyond comparison. We have language to only capture bits and pieces of the great reality that awaits us.

Do we dare to hope? Do we dare to imagine? Yes! More than that, we hope and wait with eager expectation. We abide in His words and communicate these great things to others. We sing with strong faith reminders:

*Ye sinners, seek His grace  
Whose wrath ye cannot bear;  
Fly to the shelter of His cross  
And find salvation there.*<sup>8</sup>

Why? Because the fruits of His cross are communicated to you through bread and wine as you eat His body and drink His blood. The drained and deflated are filled with His own life, His own Spirit. The hopeless are given peace. The captives to sin and death are set free. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> John 14:6

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 53:5

<sup>8</sup> And will the Judge Descend TLH 610:6

**Prayer of the Church**  
**Last Sunday of the Church Year**  
**24 November 2024**

In peace, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For wisdom to number our days and know our frailty, that we may find hope in Christ alone and rejoice at His final coming, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all pastors and servants in the Church, that trusting Christ, our only hope, they would proclaim Him in boldness and clarity, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That the light of Christ may shine on us and arm us with His Word, and that we may not be caught unawares as we await the dawning of our salvation, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For faithful vocations in the home, the church and the world that build up and cultivate God's creation according to His will, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who govern us, especially Joseph, our president; Kim, our governor; and all who make, administer and judge our laws, that God would grant them wisdom, humility and integrity, so that the work of their hands would be of benefit to all whom they serve and in accordance with His will; and that God would bring peace to our troubled world, so that all would hear the message of the Gospel and rejoice in His salvation, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially *Emily, Elsie, Keith and Pastor Koepf*; that God would cause them to rejoice and give thanks for the forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, and that God would grant by His Word and Spirit they may faithfully keep the covenant into which they have been called, boldly confess their Savior, and finally share with God's saints the joys of eternal life; let us pray to the Lord; **Lord have mercy.**

For those who God has granted another year of earthly life especially His servants, *Oliver, Tyler and Tina*; that God would send His holy angels to guard and keep His children; that they may thank and praise him for the gift of life and for the protection and care He has provided; that God would grant them to grow in grace, continue to know His loving-kindness, abide in the confession of His care and protection, serve Him faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of His joys in heaven; let us pray to the Lord; **Lord have mercy.**

For all who are sick or injured, despairing, downcast and those suffering in any way, especially *Dick, Ken, Ann, William, Zoey, Jeri, Pastor Small, Debbie, and those we name in our hearts*, that our heavenly Father would visit and relieve them; and for those who mourn, especially *the family of Jen Zebuhr*, that they and all people would be comforted with the certain hope of the resurrection, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who come to Jesus' table this day, that we would receive His very body and blood in sincere repentance and firm faith, and to our abundant blessing, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

O Lord, heavenly Father, we gratefully remember the sufferings and death of Your dear Son, Jesus Christ, for our salvation. Rejoicing in His victorious resurrection from the dead, we draw strength from His ascension before You, where He ever stands for us as our own High Priest. Gather us together from the ends of the earth to celebrate with all the faithful the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom, which has no end. Graciously receive our prayers, deliver and preserve us, for to You alone we give all glory, honor and worship, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**