

Isaiah 65:17-25

- ¹⁷ Look! I'm creating a new heaven and a new earth:
past events won't be remembered;
they won't come to mind.
- ¹⁸ Be glad and rejoice forever
in what I'm creating,
because I'm creating Jerusalem as a joy
and her people as a source of gladness.
- ¹⁹ I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad about my people.
No one will ever hear the sound of weeping or crying in it again.
- ²⁰ No more will babies live only a few days,
or the old fail to live out their days.
The one who dies at a hundred will be like a young person,
and the one falling short of a hundred will seem cursed.
- ²¹ They will build houses and live in them;
they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
- ²² They won't build for others to live in,
nor plant for others to eat.
Like the days of a tree will be the days of my people;
my chosen will make full use of their handiwork.
- ²³ They won't labor in vain,
nor bear children to a world of horrors,
because they will be people blessed by the LORD,
they along with their descendants.
- ²⁴ Before they call, I will answer;
while they are still speaking, I will hear.
- ²⁵ Wolf and lamb will graze together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox,
but the snake—its food will be dust.
They won't hurt or destroy at any place on my holy mountain,
says the LORD.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Acts 10:34-43; Isaiah 65:17-25

He is risen! He is risen indeed! I love shouting that. Since I was a little kid, I've loved that call and response. When I was 5 years old (that's over 60 years ago) our tall steeple, downtown, hoity toity church would come out to our house way out in the country for an Easter Sunrise service. Uncle Andy would build benches that faced east and looked out over the cow field. We would light tiki torches to light the way. The preacher would arrive first, then the choir members, then the rest of the congregation would pull up with their blankets and scarves. We'd sit in the dark and wait.

When the first light appeared and the horizon began to glow, we'd begin to sing quiet songs of praise and a prayer for illumination. "Come Risen Lord, light up our lives." When the sun finally peaked above the horizon the preacher would shout, "He is risen!" And all us proper Presbyterians would shout back, "He is risen indeed!" And the magic took hold of me. New light! New day! New life!

After the service we'd all go into our old antebellum home and serve donuts and hot chocolate, coffee for the grown-ups- there was a buzz. There was still that magic. But even then, at the age of 5 and 6, I'd wonder, where do we go from here? It can't get any better than this- so where do we go?

The congregation would leave, we'd go get dresses, put on our "Sunday go to meeting clothes", with stiff shirts, a tie, itchy pants and polished shoes.

Sometimes I had a fake tie, but other times it was one of those chokers and we'd head to church for Sunday school and worship – but we didn't get to shout "He is risen!" Or respond "He is risen indeed!" Well, not like we got to shout it out in the cow field. I wanted to go out to the fields and shout out loud, "He is risen!" <He is risen indeed!>

We read in scripture, God promises to "create new heavens and a new earth" way back 3,000 years ago, back in Isaiah's days. The wolf and the lamb will graze together...enemies won't hurt or destroy at any place on God's holy mountain. We now live over 2,000 years after Jesus' life, death and resurrection- so where is this new heaven and new earth? Where do we go from this time of worship and celebration out into a world that often reflects the pain and struggles, the defeats and losses of our mortal lives?

How do we continue this journey? Where is this God of love and promise? How can we walk together this journey called life?

There is division and poverty and war and injustices and just plain hurts and brokenness. Where do we go for this peace, this tranquility, this harmony Isaiah talks about?

God has a promise for us. God has promised to love us, no matter what. God has promised to never leave us alone, no matter what. God has promised to care for us, no matter what. God has shown us that death will not have the last word, no matter what. God has shown us how to live together in any type of situation, no matter what. God has given us the tools and the practices to live together with each other in peace- if we would just take it and go.

Did you hear the New Testament passage? Peter shares that he has learned through a remarkable revelation about what foods he can eat. Read Acts 10. It's a beautiful chapter. In that demonstration, Peter learns that God doesn't show ANY PARTIALITY- you know what that means to me? It means, God welcomes all. Even if we don't. Even if we don't.

The resurrection today shouts out that we can go from here loving and caring for anyone and everyone. What if they are mean to you? It doesn't matter, we can go on caring for them. What if they say ugly things about you? It doesn't matter, we can go on lifting them up and showing them grace. What if they are selfish and ignorant and mean and nasty and...and...and? It doesn't matter. Jesus is risen from the dead so we can live a new life. The new life of peace and get this, the new life of forgiveness. We are forgiven. They are forgiven. Forgiveness- that's what all this is about, forgiveness. "Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Now we may want to squabble over what "believes in him" means- but for me, and this is just me saying it, Jesus' death and resurrection means that God miraculously offers us a new way of living. A way of living that upholds everyone's dignity, uplifts everyone's position in life, lifts up a life of compassion and care that does not count the cost- for we are forgiven, forgiven.

Welcome home, no matter where you are on your spiritual journey God welcomes you here. In our baptism God has already named and claimed you, forgiven and redeemed you.

Can we believe it and can we then go from here rejoicing and inviting everyone else to join in the shouting, "He is risen?" <He is risen indeed>

This pandemic has been hard. Amen? This Lent has been difficult, amen? – but we are now in Eastertide where shouts of praise are all over the place for He is risen! <He is risen indeed>. The miracle and mystery of God's care for us is shown in the resurrection. God is loving and forgiving and offering new- new ways to relate, new ways to gather, new ways to celebrate, new opportunities to hold each other. As we have been forgiven, we are now witnesses to the resurrection and we go from here rejoicing.

He is risen! <He is risen indeed>

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