

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, 26th Sunday After Pentecost, Nov. 13, 2016

Everything New Under the Sun

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November 13, 2016

Isaiah 65:17-25 Luke 21:5-19

To put our scripture reading from Isaiah in context, the time frame was around the time the Jews were returning from exile in Babylon. The prophet is saying that everything will be new under the sun. There will be a new heaven, a new earth and a new city of Jerusalem. Infant deaths will no longer occur. People will live very long lives and the wolf and lamb, the lion and ox will eat together in harmony.

The people returned expecting Jerusalem to be a new city, but of course it wasn't. The Temple had been restored but not much else had been. The city was shabby, the walls were gone, and there was rubble of houses and markets everywhere. Everything had to be rebuilt.

Charles Cousar, et al ⁽¹⁾ said that people had thought about the new Jerusalem *"... in all-to-tangible terms --- the city of bricks and stones their ancestors had inhabited since the days of David."* But that was not what Isaiah was promising. What Yahweh, God, *"... had in mind far transcended the new Jerusalem of the merchants and traders who called the city of David home."* Yes, parts of Jerusalem had been restored, and the city was being restored, but God was not looking at the old city. His *"... eye was on another Jerusalem ... a Jerusalem not of bricks and mortar, but of the human heart."*

Isaiah speaks of the perennial problems that plagued humankind --- infant mortality, premature death, and many more. The new creation would banish all of those problems forever. But when would all of this happen?

It will happen when everything is new under the Son.

In our lesson from Luke, Jesus is talking about the destruction of the Temple and of the city. He is talking about wars and insurrections, earthquakes, famine and plagues. People would be arrested and imprisoned for following Jesus, Family members would betray them and they would be hated. Many would be put to death. False messiahs would abound.

That doesn't sound like a new heaven and a new earth --- it sounds like hell on earth.

So where is this new heaven and new earth that Isaiah promised and that Jesus promised?

In funeral services we often hear words from Revelation promising a new heaven and a new earth. *“Then I saw ‘a new heaven and a new earth’, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away ... I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God ... There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”* (Rev. 21:1-4).

Amanda Benckhuysen ⁽²⁾ wrote, *“Even our very best days, when the sun is shining and it seems like everything is going well, there is a kind of weariness to our lives, a weariness that stems from years of living with the brokenness of the world and with battling the darkness in our own hearts. Sin takes its toll, gnawing away at our spirits.”*

Have you ever felt this way? I know that I have. The Jews who returned from Babylon felt this way as do people today. A bright sunny day is quickly clouded over when we hear or read of poverty, terrorist attacks, political squabbles in Congress, and more and more.

Where is this new heaven and new earth? Where indeed?

It isn't here or now --- it will be when everything is new under the Son --- when Christ returns and brings his kingdom to earth. That is what we call the end-time, the time when God's kingdom comes. It is the promise of salvation, the promise of eternal life with Christ.

“Our lesson for today is one of those outrageous imaginative visions of prophetic hope that see beyond the weariness of the present reality to a time when the eternal will break in on the temporal and sin and all its weariness will be but a distant memory. Then there will be joy and laughter and life. Our lesson today is a word of comfort. A word to sustain us in our trials and tribulations, a word that invites us to draw close to God in Christ through the power of the Spirit that we might be strengthened and restored even now while we wait for the full coming of the kingdom of God.” ⁽²⁾

In an Advent sermon, Walter Bruggemann ⁽³⁾ said that *“Heaven and earth will rejoice because in that new world wrought by God, there will be no more ... weeping, no more homeless ... no more broken [people] ... no more terrorized folk ...*

“Heaven and earth will rejoice because ... there will be no more infant mortality ... and no more people who will die too young...”

“When the newness comes, every person will live safely ... unafraid, and at peace...”

“Heaven and earth will rejoice, because in that new world wrought by God, God will be like a mother who hears and answers in the night, knowing before we call what is needed. And we shall never be left alone again.”

In two weeks the season of Advent begins. Yes, Advent leads up to the celebration of the birth of our Lord and Savior, the first Advent, but it really is about the second Advent, the return of Christ and the establishment of God’s new heaven and new earth, the time when Isaiah’s predictions and Jesus’ promises will come to pass. It is called the Parousia, the end time, but it really is the beginning time for all who have earned Christ’s favor.

Amen.

1. Charles B. Cousar, et al, Texts for Preaching, Year C, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 1994.
2. Amanda W. Benckhuysen in “The Presbyterian Outlook”, June 10, 2013.
3. The Collected Sermons of Walter Bruggemann, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2011.

Note: Scripture quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible, 2011