

Re-creative God

November 14, 2010 Ord 33C

Scripture: Psalm 98, Isaiah 65:17-25

Psalm 98

98:1 O sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things. His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory.

98:2 The LORD has made known his victory; he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations.

98:3 He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.

98:4 Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises.

98:5 Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody.

98:6 With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD.

98:7 Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who live in it.

98:8 Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy

98:9 at the presence of the LORD, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity

Isaiah 65:17-25

65:17 For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.

65:18 But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.

65:19 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.

65:20 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.

65:21 They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

65:22 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.

65:23 They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD-- and their descendants as well.

65:24 Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.

65:25 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.

Proclamation of the Word

In light of the beautiful vision of hope presented in the Prayer and Praise of the people of God, consider some events of this week:

- Christians and Iraqi security forces killed in a Catholic church and 7 bombs detonated within an hour this week in Baghdad
- Cholera escalating in already devastated Haiti
- Gang Violence/drug violence in Mexico which spills over our borders
- A Taliban attack on an Army Base in Afghanistan

The doomsayers decry "Armageddon" once again, and the people of faith say both, "How long, O Lord?" and, at the same time say, "In you, O Lord, we will place our trust and our hope." Isaiah brings a word of hope after the people have suffered at the hands of the Babylonians- war and exile has taken its toll.

The people of God have known long-suffering. The story goes...

A man goes to his rabbi with questions. He asks, "Rabbi, is it true that we Jews suffered at the hands of the Egyptians because we were the chosen people?" The rabbi said, "Yes, it is." "Is it true we suffered at the hands of the Assyrians and Babylonians because we were the chosen people?" "Yes," the rabbi answered, "that is also true." Once again he asked, "Is it true we suffered at the hands of the Romans because we were the chosen people?" "Yes, that too is true." "Rabbi, haven't we also suffered at the hands of the Christians, the Nazis, and the Muslims because we are the chosen people?" "Yes," the rabbi said, "all of that is true." The man said, "Then, Rabbi, don't you think it is time that God chose another people?"

We laugh because there is something so true there. The Jewish people have suffered much as have people of other faiths like Christians today in a hostile Middle East. In Biblical witness, the destruction and suffering of people is seen as God's judgment upon them and a call to return to faithfulness to God's intentions and purposes.

Sometimes destruction is a willful act of human greed, self-interest. Sometimes destruction is a judgment, of sorts. Think of American history. Think of the classic movie *Gone with the Wind*. Picture Scarlett O'Hara in her fine plantation house at Tara. She goes from "War, war, war, takes all the fun out of the parties" to destruction after the war and Scarlett saying, "God as my witness, I won't go hungry again". In her character of Scarlet O'Hara, she is a human image of the downfall of a system based on oppression and the enslavement of human beings. That system is judged to be wrong.

Isaiah 65 gives us a vision for God's work and completion of a broken, sinful world. It is a vision of hope for heaven and earth not just a pie in the sky religion focused on life after death only. Walter Brueggemann, Old Testament Scholar reminds us, "the creation has within it hope that leans toward God in desperate, urgent expectation that God will indeed liberate the world from its terrible decay and bondage. Such a lyrical affirmation cannot be easy to utter in a technological society...The Bible thinks very large, well beyond our privatistic, personalistic faith, in its confidence about the renewal and mending of the world." (Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation*, p. 45). The vision of Isaiah 65 reminds us of God's vast purpose for the whole creation. How do we catch and sustain God's vision, while working towards it at the same time. We need some sources, which God uses throughout time. We need: The eyes of children, the imagination of artists, the gifts of creation, and hope for the long haul.

WE NEED THE EYES OF CHILDREN...

Children see possibilities which we sometimes cannot see.

My niece, Hannah, went to the church preschool. Her teacher did not seem like the type to work with children with very little personality. An adult asked as adults do, "Do you like your teacher, Hannah?" "Not Yet!" Hannah was hopeful. She didn't say NO. She said, "Not yet"

Pablo Casals, the Spanish Cellist once said, "We should say to each of them(our children): Do you know what you are? You are a marvel. You are unique. In all the years that have passed, there has never been another child like you. Your legs, your arms, your clever fingers, the way you move.

You may become a Shakespeare, a Michelangelo, a Beethoven. You have the capacity for anything. Yes, you are a marvel. And when you grow up, can you then harm another who is, like you, a marvel?

You must work, we must all work, to make the world worthy of its children." **Pablo Casals (1876-1973)**

The young inspire the better angels of our nature. Consider the civil rights movement. In Birmingham in 1963, it was 2,000 young people who marched out of worship from the New Pilgrim Baptist Church to face the dogs and fire hoses of Bull Connor and his men. They came face to face with them and then knelt and prayed. Rev. Charles Billups shouted, "Turn on your water! Turn loose your dogs! We will stand here 'til we die!" And the

police parted and the children of God walked through as though the Red Sea had parted. Freedom was on its way. The words of Paul to young Timothy in the Bible rings in our ears, "Do not let them look down on you because you are young but set an example in faith..." Young people can harness the power of our best selves and follow a vision. We need the eyes of our children.

WE NEED THE IMAGINATION OF ARTISTS...

Seona Reid, Principal of Glasgow School of Art, in the graduation address of spring 2004 said, "Artists are simply people who are passionate enough to imagine things that do not yet exist."

Poets, musicians, artists to help us imagine what we cannot see. They help us catch vision of the possible. In the Creation story of Genesis 2, God Almighty bends down, scoops up some dirt and begins to fashion a person. I picture God like a child lost in his play hunched down over the masterpiece. Work becomes pure PLAY. What joy God must have had creating the world. In my mind's eye, I picture God like a child sculpting and playing the earth's sandbox.

We are created in the image of this playful, re-creative God, called to create and catch a vision for what can be not just what is. Ah, how we need artists, musicians, poets for their imagination!

WE NEED THE GIFTS OF CREATION...

Psalm 98 is a wonderful vision of all Creation enjoying the blessings and abundance of what God created. We have contemporary psalmists, as well. One is Wendell Berry, a Baptist Kentucky farmer and author whose faith guides his advocacy for the environment and his complete and utter appreciation for what it means to be humans created in God's image. Berry's fiction, poetry, and activism reminds us that we are not created to be consumers as culture tries to tell us, but to be stewards, caretakers and creative partners with this re-creative God.

Berry would appreciate this point in the mission statement of the Clemson Experimental Forest: "The forest serves as a rejuvenating sanctuary, revitalizing the bond between people and the natural environment and benefiting the community at large." Listen to his poem.

The Peace of Wild Things by Wendell Berry

*When despair grows in me
and I wake in the middle of the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting for their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

We need to guard and enjoy the gifts of Creation.

WE NEED HOPE FOR THE LONG HAUL...

Have you heard the quote by Tacitus "In valor, there is hope."? The message is backwards. The reality is, "In hope, there is valor." That is, where there is hope for a better today, as well as a better tomorrow, there is strength, and courage, the will to sacrifice, to make a difference. (Or as Dr. Harold Cheatum suggested the two are reciprocal, hope and valor. Actually, I like that better!)

John C. Holbert reflects on the Isaiah passage, "When a Christian and a Muslim sit down to eat and talk, it is a sign of the rule of God. When people band together to begin the eradication of malaria in Africa, it is a sign of the reign of God. When prostate cancer deaths are reduced to increasingly smaller fractions, it is a sign of the reign of God. When millions are fed, when Habitat for Humanity builds another 100 houses, these are signs of the reign of God. Isaiah 65:17-25 is a sign and seal of the certainty of the coming reign of God. It is a divine vision that we can never fail to hold before us, reminding us of our part in the dream and reminding us of God's constant work to make that dream a reality. "Thy kingdom come," we say, and it will, oh, yes, it will." <http://www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/Thy-Kingdom-Come-Reflections-on-Isaiah.html>

We Christians are in the Kingdom business for the long haul. And long after we do our part, there will be other generations who will rise up. I find that hopeful. "Nothing worth doing can be accomplished in a single lifetime," Reinhold Niebuhr said. "Therefore we are saved by hope."

We do our part to be stewards of these mysteries while we are here on this earth. But more than that, we remember that we have hope in a God who can and will bring wholeness and healing out of the mess and destruction...re-creating- a new heaven and a new earth...all things giving praise to its Maker and living in God's perfect and peaceful shalom together.

In that vision and in this God, we hope.

Prayer:

Expand our vision Lord for your intentions for all which you have created.

Expand our vision, Lord, for your intentions for our role in this abundant creation.

Expand our vision, Lord that sees beyond just us to the whole human family which you spoke into being and whom you love.

Expand our vision, Lord.

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