

Rejoice Forever in Creation

November 16, 2025 (2)

Isaiah 65:17-29

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.

Luke 21:5-19

⁵ Some people were talking about the temple, how it was decorated with beautiful stones and ornaments dedicated to God. Jesus said, ⁶ "As for the things you are admiring, the time is coming when not even one stone will be left upon another. All will be demolished."

⁷ They asked him, "Teacher, when will these things happen? What sign will show that these things are about to happen?" ⁸ Jesus said, "Watch out that you aren't deceived. Many will come in my name, saying, 'I'm the one!' and 'It's time!' Don't follow them.

⁹When you hear of wars and rebellions, don't be alarmed. These things must happen first, but the end won't happen immediately."

¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, "Nations and kingdoms will fight against each other. ¹¹There will be great earthquakes and wide-scale food shortages and epidemics. There will also be terrifying sights and great signs in the sky. ¹²But before all this occurs, they will take you into custody and harass you because of your faith. They will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. ¹³This will provide you with an opportunity to testify. ¹⁴Make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance. ¹⁵I'll give you words and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to counter or contradict. ¹⁶You will be betrayed by your parents, brothers and sisters, relatives, and friends. They will execute some of you. ¹⁷Everyone will hate you because of my name. ¹⁸Still, not a hair on your heads will be lost. ¹⁹By holding fast, you will gain your lives.



This Sunday we begin in Isaiah 65. The words of the prophet are really a continuation of what we talked about last week –

Emmanuel, God with us, present in the here and now, inviting us to bring the kingdom of God into this moment, into our daily living. Our Old Testament

passage for today begins with these words: *"Look! I'm creating a new heaven and a new earth: past events won't be*

remembered; they won't come to mind." The first part of this verse

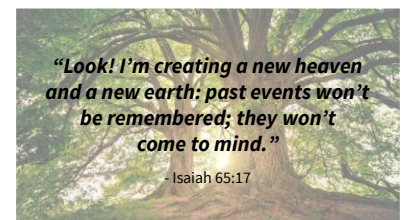
speaks into what God desires to do in the here and now. For Israel,

the second half of this verse means that the sin and hardship of exile will not be remembered

or brought back up by God. As Isaiah writes in 65:16, *"Past troubles will be forgotten and*

hidden from my sight." For us, these words and this promise also remind us that the sins and

failures of our past will be no more.



Made new again, over and over, God forgives us, removes our sins, leaving us as white as snow. For this new creation, in and around us, we say thanks be to God! As we prepare to rejoice in this gift of God, let us pray...

Holy One, we come into your house with joy. In the shelter of your sanctuary, we find rest. We seek your blessing, your Word, your fire. God of peace and beauty, in the midst of the world's chaos, we turn to you. With anxiety all around us, we open our hearts to your grace. Beneath the noise of this world, speak your quiet, steady Word to us. Even in the tumult, we are listening. It is with this need to hear that I ask that the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts are acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Turning first to Isaiah 65, the prophet's words point us to a future with hope. In the context of this writing, these words come from the third section of Isaiah, written after the exiles have returned from Babylon. This would fit into the period when the temple was being rebuilt by Zerubbabel with encouragement from the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Isaiah's words would also be heard as words of great encouragement and hope. The rebuilding project had begun again but the road ahead was long and their faith was weak. The project called for all they had to give, and they were not great in numbers.

We hear these words today and we can find hope in our time. All is not well in our society either. There is great division in our land – political, social, economic – and these things are often intertwined. Food insecurity amongst the most vulnerable among us is just one example where social and political division and an unwillingness to work together are creating hardship and suffering for those Jesus would call “the least of these.”



God invites the new Israel to *“be glad and rejoice forever”* because of what God is about to do. In the new heaven and earth, Jerusalem (or Zion or God’s people) will be a source of gladness for the nations. In this new world order, there will be no weeping or crying and the old will not fail to live out their days. Those not living past 100 years of age will seem cursed. Unlike past times that led to exile, the people of God will build houses and live in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. In verse 23 the prophet declares that they will not *“bear children into a world of horrors.”* Doesn’t that sound nice? For Israel, struggling to recover from their 70 years in exile, struggling to envision a future with hope, struggling to reconnect their God, these are amazing words to hear. And it gets better.

In addition to the food security and long, healthy life that God’s people will enjoy in the new heaven and earth, there is also the promise of a great spiritual blessing that will be experienced by the people of God. There will be a deep spiritual connection with God. In verse 24 we read, *“Before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear.”* God will be like their best friend, finishing their prayer sentences, knowing their needs before they are voiced. This great intimacy with God will lead to a time of great peace and unity. And this peace and unity will not be evident only amongst humanity. It will include all of creation. This is spelled out most beautifully in verse 25, where we read, *“Wolf and lamb will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox.”* Even the animals of the wild that had been “adversaries” will be live side by side, in peace, in the coming new heaven and earth.

Doesn’t that sound nice? Wouldn’t it be great if all of this were to happen today? Oh, how we would rejoice with all of creation if God’s presence and peace and unity reigned today.

This hope is part of the larger sense of Advent. Today, as we lit the candle of faith and sang the words that called for wisdom from on high, we asked God in song to “order all things far and nigh; to us the path of knowledge show and cause us in her ways to go.” Wisdom is certainly needed for the age in which we live. Our world desperately needs God to reorder things according to the hope that we find in Isaiah’s words. God’s guidance and knowledge of God’s ways seem lacking in our current world. We need the peace and the unity that will be present in the new heaven and earth.

The Advent season calls us to a sense of anticipation, and it reminds us that God has much more in store for us and for our world. We know that our world and our nation need to change. We know that the brokenness of our world is beyond our power to repair. We know that the harm being caused by hatred, division, prejudice, and self-centeredness has gone past our ability to correct or redeem. We know that our collective way of living has excluded too many, has pushed down and set aside too many, has run over and used up too many people, too many resources, and too many cultures. Humanity and creation, we both need help. It is hard to look at our world today and then to rejoice. We need God to save us.

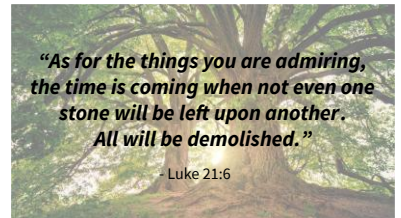
One of the problems today is that instead of looking to the Savior, we look to a savior, small “s.” To live in a world where peace and unity are the reality, we know that much has to change. There are plenty of people in our world who claim to be our savior, again, small “s.” They promise to make our lives better and to make our world better. It simply cannot be our own sins and failures that have gotten us to this place of brokenness and hatred and division. So we turn to leaders who blame someone else for our pain and our problems, leaders who seek to drive out said offenders, so that we can live in security and comfort.

But this is not how the kingdom of God is proclaimed. There is only one solution to the brokenness and hatred and division of our world. That Savior, the one with a capital “S,” that one has a word to say about the new heaven and earth. Turning to our second passage, from Luke 21, we delve into what Jesus has to say about the coming kingdom of God.

In the opening verses, we see Jesus redefining kingdom priorities. As our passage begins, Jesus notes how some people are admiring the temple, with its beautiful stonework and ornamental features. He tells those drawn to the things of this

world, *“As for the things you are admiring, the time is coming when not even one stone will be left upon another. All will be demolished.”*

Wait, is Jesus talking about the temple here or is he talking about the brokenness and hatred and division of the world? Many today look at the self-proclaimed saviors, small “s,” and admire the ways that they create a false sense of security and comfort.



As we continue in Luke 21, the audience asks Jesus, “When?” When will the temple be destroyed? Instead of telling them, “Forty years,” which will be when the Romans level the temple that Jesus’ audience is admiring, Jesus gives a future answer that again calls us to hold fast to hope and to cling to our faith. As we work through these words of Jesus, hope and faith will be essential if we are to remain true to the only Savior, big “S.”

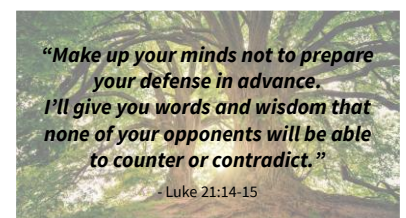
Jesus first begins with a warning against the false saviors, against “*deceivers*” who will come and certainly have come. Jesus tells us, don’t listen to their claims that they are the one, the one to save us. He tells us, *“Don’t follow them.”* Jesus then says that there will be signs that will come before the end of this present age. And there will be trials and suffering.

In verses 10 and 11, Jesus lists some of the signs: *“Nations... will fight against each other. There will be great earthquakes and wide-scale food shortages.”* War, natural disasters, hunger and famine? These are all parts of our world right now. Continuing, Jesus tells his followers, *“But first...”* Before the world as we know it becomes the new kingdom of God here on earth, before all that, *“They will take you into custody and harass you because of your faith.”* Before God’s peace and unity are the hallmarks of this world, before the brokenness and hatred and division of the world are no more, the followers of Jesus will have a role to play. Yes, we will have a role to play.



The faithful, because of their efforts to bring about the new heaven and earth, will face trial and persecution. This, my friends, does not sound like the joy and gladness and rejoicing that is described in Isaiah’s words from chapter 65. Instead, we might prefer a bit of security and comfort. Yet this is not what we are called to by Jesus. Taking the easy way was never the way of Christ. So, as we press on, we find great hope and promise in the words of Jesus.

When we stand for the things of God’s kingdom, standing against the greed and division and hatred of our world today, Jesus says that we will be brought before the rulers of this world. Our Savior says that this will be an *“opportunity.”* Yes, an opportunity. When harassed because our faith flies in opposition to the ways of this world, hear Jesus’ words of hope and trust found in verses 14 and 15: *“Make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance. I’ll give you words and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to counter or contradict.”* Don’t carefully plan out your defense.



Don't hire some great lawyers to win your case before the powers of this world. And don't rely on yourself or on any other thing of this world. The Spirit will give you words to speak. The Spirit will fill you with a wisdom that nothing in this world can stand up against. This is the wisdom from on high that we sang of earlier. Relying on the Spirit, we are trusting God to "order all things far and nigh" and to show us the "path of knowledge" so that we will go and speak and act according to in God's will and way.

Now, this will not be an easy road to walk. There is a cost, sometimes great, to following the Savior, the one who set the example for us to follow. Giving us a glimpse of what God's kingdom looks like here on earth, we see that Jesus first gathered to himself those on the margins. Our Christ sat at the table with the broken, the grieving, the outcast, the shamed, the different, the lost. He sat at the table and ate with them, heard their stories, healed their brokenness and their pain. This was the challenge we heard from Conference Supt. Dan Bader at our charge conference last week after church as he shared the story of sitting and talking with and eventually hugging a homeless man that initially made his skin crawl.

Jesus warns us of the cost. Friends and family will betray us, leading some to be executed by the powers of this world. We will be hated by those seeking to preserve their hold on power, just as Jesus was by the religious and political leaders of his day. And then Jesus gives us a promise. It is a promise of hope. It is a promise that empowers us to speak and act in ways that fight against the evils of this age: against greed, prejudice, power over, marginalization. In verses 18 and 19 we read, *"Not a hair on your heads will be lost. By holding fast, you will gain your lives."* Jesus is speaking of the long game here, of our eternal reality.



Our daily living, our standing firm and holding fast to the faith, will one day make a place in heaven our reality. For Jesus, though, his life and ministry were not about just getting the twelve disciples or even all of those who followed him when he lived on the earth into heaven. That was surely part of it. But for Jesus, in the things he said and did, in the way he lived and modeled the faith, it was much more about flinging wide open the doors to the banquet hall. Jesus' example teaches us to stand and to speak against the hate and greed, against the division and injustice of this world. It is only when these self-centered and power-hungry evils are defeated that the kingdom of God will begin to become a reality here on earth. It is only then that we will rejoice forever in creation.



Because of the wisdom that we receive from on high, spoken through the Spirit within us, we will be heard when we are seeking to build God's kingdom here on earth. Our words will not be words of hatred and division but will be words of invitation and welcome. Our words will invite the least and the lost to connect into our communities of faith and to invest our lives in one another's. Our words will invite all people to know the one who invested in us, the one who hears the cries of our hearts, the one who knows us, cares for us, and shows us how to hear, know, love, and care for one another. May we go forth this day to show the world that there is room for all of us in the kingdom of God. May it be so for you and for me. Alleluia and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. How might sitting with and talking with – and maybe even hugging – someone who is totally different from you lead to a growth in your faith?
- 2) *Pray*. Where does the brokenness and hatred and division of the world most break your heart? Spend some time in prayer this week asking for God to act in our world.
- 3) *Study*. Read Isaiah 66:10-16. How do these words extend Israel's blessing from Isaiah 65 out into the whole world? How might the God of people do something similar today?