

“Called to be a Community of Hope”

Our first reading is from Isaiah, chapter 65, verses 17 through 25, which can be found on page 696 in the Old Testament section of your pew bible. Isaiah, chapter 65, beginning with the 17th verse. Listen for God’s word to you.

Isaiah 65:17–25 (NRSV)

¹⁷ For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. 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. 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. 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. ²¹ They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. 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. 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. ²⁴ Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. 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.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to our church. **Thanks be to God.**

“Called to Be a Community of Hope”

Our second reading carries on the vision of the prophet Isaiah where God talks about the transformation of the world; where all things are made new and right and perfect. It comes from the book of Revelation, in chapter 21, verses 1 through 7, which can be found on page 259 in the New Testament section of your pew bible. Revelation, chapter 21, beginning with the 1st verse. Listen for God’s word to you.

Revelation 21:1–7 (NRSV)

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; ⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” ⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” ⁶ Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ Those who

conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to our church. **Thanks be to God.**

Today we continue in our sermon series on the Calling of the Church, what it means that God calls us to be a community of faith, a community of hope, a community of love, and a community of witness. Today, we focus on what it means to be a community of hope.

In our denomination's Book of Order it says:

In affirming with the earliest Christians that Jesus is Lord, the Church confesses that he is its hope, and that the Church, as Christ's body, is bound to his authority and thus free to live in the lively, joyous reality of the grace of God. (F-1.0204)

I love that line. Who is our hope? Christ is. To whom are we bound? To Christ and his authority. And being bound to him, what does that do for us? It frees us to live in the lively, joyous reality of the grace of God. This is to be who we are: people who are bound to Christ and are free to live in the grace of God.

That's how Presbyterians understand themselves. At the same time, sinner and saint, bound and yet free, guilty and yet living in a joyous new reality that is God's grace and mercy. That's the reality in which we live.

Our hope is Christ, who was raised from the dead. He is Lord. All things have been given to him. And we have an inheritance with him.

And what is that inheritance? A promise! That God is making a new creation. That's what we celebrate on Easter Sunday, that the new creation has begun, that Christ, risen and alive, is the first fruit of that new creation. That's what the resurrection is all about; Christ conquering sin and death and bringing new life to the world. And the promise we have from God is that God is going to make all things new.

Just a little bit later in our Book of Order, it says:

The Church is to be a community of hope, rejoicing in the sure and certain knowledge that, in Christ, God is making a new creation. This new creation is a new beginning for human life and for all things. The Church lives in the present on the strength of that promised new creation. (from F-1.0301)

Listen to that last line again, it's important! The Church lives in the present on the strength of that promised new creation.

Christian hope is different from wishful thinking. It's not simply a desire that something good will happen in the future. **What would be something that we could label as wishful thinking?**

And it's different from optimism, which is founded which is dependent upon a likely outcome of a given situation. **What's an example of situational optimism?**

Christian hope is different. It is based on a promise. It rests on, it stands on, a promise from God that God is going to bring about a new creation, that God is going to transform the world so that God can live in peace and harmony with God's people. This is the Christian hope. Not that we would escape this world, but that God, in Christ, is making a new creation.

That's the ultimate trajectory of scripture. That's where the entire biblical story is pointing us. We have this promise, that God's good creation will be restored, renewed, transformed and that heaven and

earth will become one and we will dwell with God in this new and perfect creation; a return, if you will, to the garden of Eden.

That's how the story begins (in the garden) and that's how the story ends (with God and Christ, dwelling among God's people in a new creation).

And because we know how this story ends, it should have a great impact on what we do and how we live. If we understand that we as individuals and as a church are members of Christ's body called to live as his disciples, then it is also true that we are called to join in Christ's work in this world; we are called to make a difference.

The divine promise doesn't ask us to sit down and wait passively for God's new creation to come about, as if by magic. In Hebrew, there are two words for hope (יְהִי and קוֹה) and both have at their root the idea of waiting; expectant waiting. We are waiting, but it's not a passive waiting, because God invites us to live into this hope, to lean into God's good future for us and join in recognizing the seeds of this new world and helping them grow. This hope is a source of energy for us to live differently, not according to the values of a society based on the thirst for possession and competition but to live into the promise and join in God's work of making all things new; bringing health and wholeness and a concern for others to a troubled world.

Christian hope is about expectation; it's something we anticipate. It is related to trust, because it is dependent upon on God. It doesn't matter the situation. The situation can be hopeless, but our hope rests on God; a god who works all things for the good of those who love him. It is a faithful trust and expectation that God is going to make things right; that God is going to bring about justice; that God is going to bring peace and wholeness and all of that together for God's people.

So how do we live as community of hope on the strength of this promise? What are things that a community of hope does? Where do go? What do we do? (hold open for conversation)

Notice how different this is from what people normally think about in terms of Christian hope? For years, Christian hope has been about going to heaven and living forever in heaven with God. But that's not the biblical understanding of Christian hope. It's not about the world being destroyed, wiped away and God starting over. It's about redemption and renewal; not replacement. How does this affect our life and ministry together? What are we waiting for? And what do we expect? (hold more open conversation)