

Beloved, We Belong

Sermon by Jan Wiersma

Community Presbyterian Church - Rochester, Minnesota

19th Sunday after Pentecost - October 3, 2021

Texts: Isaiah 65:17-25; Psalm 113; Mark 10:23-31

SCRIPTURE READING Isaiah 65:17-25

The vision of a new creation prophesied by Isaiah considers seriously the wellbeing of the world's children. We have yet to see this kingdom come.

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

GOSPEL READING Mark 10:23-31

In the past four weeks, we have observed the love of parents for children, and the strength of the community that supports them. We have heard Jesus instruct people to welcome children, and to receive the kingdom as eagerly and trustingly as children. Now he startles his disciples with the universal truth that all children and families belong to one another.

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.” Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

Beloved of the Beloved, our readings today reveal the dream of those who wrote the Bible for a beautiful future. Biblical scholars would call it an eschatological future, a fancy word that means a foretaste of what we might call utopia - or heaven!

But before we get into that, here's a dream I had myself, last week. Friends of mine, some pastors, but not all pastors, had gathered for a sort of book discussion, to talk about four different readings. I realized that all the texts asked the same question, "Where is the risen Jesus showing up in your life right now?" So I asked everyone: "Where is the risen Jesus showing up for you?" A man shook his head and added, "And no jive!"

I think he meant, cut the pastor-speak, with fancy words like "eschatological." Let's talk in words we can all understand. And don't talk in vague universals. The truth we need to hear comes in the personal encounters, where Jesus, a living, risen Jesus, shows up in the detail of our lives.

Here's one: On Friday, Bob and I were invited to a 2-year-old's birthday party at an organic farm where they make wood fired pizza. At first all I saw was the beauty of the place, a hidden green valley rimmed with thick woods turning color: green, red, yellow, orange, all mixed and mingled. The place is actually called Dream Acres. Then a drizzly rain started falling (I'd forgotten umbrellas). I got a little wet, a little grouchy. Then I looked around: the people were as diverse as the trees, and as mixed and mingled - including the LDS couple (aka Mormons) who had invited us. There were families everywhere; parents standing or sitting in little clumps, children running wild over the grass. Even the 2-year-old birthday boy. The rain didn't bother them. Their wild play didn't bother the grownups. No one was watching them - but everyone was. You couldn't tell which child belonged to whom. And I realized: all these children, all these people, belong to me. I may not know them, but I'm part of them. They're part of me. The risen Jesus shows up when we all keep each other safe. I thought of the line from Isaiah's dream: "They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain."

Also this week, I met a man named John Stoesz through our mutual connection to a Native American settlement in the Granite Falls area. Dakota people have bought back 21 acres there in a project called Makoce Ikikcupi, or Land Recovery (<https://makoceikikcupi.com/>). They are building a village called Zani Otunwe, or Village of Wellness. So often we hear of nothing but the troubled history of broken treaties and the clash between white settlers and Indigenous peoples, like the heart-breaking stories of the children buried in unmarked graves at Indian schools. We need to know these stories, but we need to go beyond them, to see where Indigenous culture is coming back to life: here in the Land Recovery project and the Village of Wellness, we can see Dakota, Lakota, Ojibwe, and other peoples making a safe place for their children to grow and to learn traditional ways of building and speaking, hunting, harvesting, and worshipping. Some are the same Sisseton-Wahpeton people of the Dakota who lived on and stewarded this very land, as we acknowledge every Sunday! John is Mennonite, but he lets Native people lead him in telling this story to white people. I thought again of Isaiah's dream: "BB shall not build

and another inhabit; 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.” Maybe not called by name, but Jesus shows up there.

Jesus shows up every time we share what is life-giving. At Session last Tuesday, Ronda Marshall told the story of two scouts who had joined her troupe last year. Who knew, especially in this crazy year we’ve had, whether they’d stick with it, or drop away? But they stayed, and one in particular is a changed child, thriving in school and in every other way. Jesus showed up for that child through Ronda’s troupe, and Jesus showed up for us at Session when Ronda told her story. Heavy hearts are lighter when sorrows are shared; happy hearts are contagious. I thought of Jesus’ promise that anyone who gave of their own time and life to show up for others would receive 100 times back again: homes, brothers, mothers, sisters, fields, and children. He never said it would be easy, though.

So where has Jesus showed up for you this week? I want to change things up a little, if you’ll humor me. I want us to share our joys and concerns right here and now, because this sermon time doesn’t just belong to me, it belongs to all of us: No jive!

Prayers:

We remember the children of the Indian residential schools.

Their tears, their hunger, their loneliness, and their fears are not forgotten.

*We pray that all your children may once again sing
and dance the songs planted in their hearts since time immemorial.*

We pray that in their play and in their learning they may be strengthened in wisdom and truth.

May they carry the knowledge of their ancestors—those ways of life that brought abundance and joy to this pilgrimage on earth.

We remember all the children who have journeyed with us these last weeks: refugee children, children lacking safe water, children in lands devastated by volcano, earthquake, and hurricane, children who have lost homes for whatever reason, children in ICUs struggling with covid - and also all the children who give us the best hugs of our lives.

We pray that Jesus may show up in our personal care for those we love. With all of them, we dream of a future where healing will be complete, when mourning and crying and tears will be no more, for the risen Jesus will shine like the sun in the center of our world. In his name we pray, Amen

Listen again to the dream of Isaiah’s beautiful vision: God says, “No more shall the sound of weeping be heard, or the cry of distress.... 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.... They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.... They shall not labor in vain, or bear

children for calamity or terror; The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain.”

And the promise of Jesus: “There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age and in the age to come eternal life.”

What have we learned, as we have pondered how Jesus in his lifetime showed up for children, how the risen Jesus shows up today? I hope we’ve learned that Jesus makes all of us family, kin to one another, as passionate for the thriving of all children as we are for those we gave birth to. And so, when we meet the risen Jesus, we bid him welcome in all our kin, and pray for the kin-dom truly to come, where the dream of peace is no longer just a dream, but a glorious reality. TBTG. Amen