

“When the future speaks ...”

November 18, 2007

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

I.

One of the glorious affirmations of the Bible is that—no surprise—God believes in the future. Always, in the witnessing of God in the Bible—through the prophets of old, with Jesus, and with the followers of Jesus as well—the future is painted with colors of hope and promise.

Part of what this means for us is that the life that God gives is—always—coming. It’s coming! Always, it is on the way.

And today, on this Thanksgiving Sunday, we are reminded how thankful we are that *God knows what can be*. God knows the possibilities that tomorrow can bring.

Our reading from Luke 21 this morning is part of the apocalyptic discourse in the gospel stories. The apocalyptic speaks to us from a sense of ultimacy and finality. And its final message, of course, is a message of hope and promise. While the apocalyptic discourse gets messy with talk of war and upheaval of all kinds, it does two important things for these early Christians:

1. It inspires them to be witnesses and to stay the course, amidst whatever dangers and challenges that might surround them ... in other words, it gives them strength and courage for the moment ...
2. And it lifts their vision to the other side of the messiness and the turmoil; again, it’s a message of hope ...

By your endurance you will gain your souls, says Jesus ...

There may be enormous, heart-wrenching struggles in some of the tomorrows that lie ahead, but—not to worry—for the God of *life* ... the God of eternal blessings and light ... your Savior God is on the way.

II.

Listen to the prophetic voice of **third Isaiah**:

For I am about to create a new heavens and a new earth ... the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice for ever in what I am creating ...

The point about this is that it is ongoing. It never ends. No matter what mess we make of the present, God is coming; a new day is on the horizon.

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.

What's important in all of this for us is that the future has a voice. It is a voice coming from the heart and imagination of the Creator God ... the God who sees the present ... and who understands the magnitude of the mess we tend to make of things ... but, yet, still, it sounds a chord of hope.

And so, once again, in this season of thanksgiving, we are thankful that *God knows what can be*.

As Christians, as people of hope—always—it's important that we not allow ourselves to get too bogged down in the muddy waters of the present.

The present ... the state of affairs at the moment ... the wars, the economy ... the struggle and tribulation ... the disease, the affliction ... the hurt, the pain ... whatever it is, it's NOT the last word.

III.

If we're not careful, it's easy to slide into a place where we have *tunnel vision* about our lives. We get down and discouraged to the point where we begin to think that's all there is ... that nothing will ever change.

Sometimes, the present, the *now* of our life, overwhelms. It's just too full of tainted and flawed stuff ... stuff that doesn't swiftly and neatly resolve and fall into place.

Whether it's finances, or health concerns, or our primary relationships—the relationships that we've always counted on and trusted, and now things are suddenly off kilter a bit and there are rough edges that need to be worked out.

Again, about all of this, the Bible offers a fresh word—a word of hope and promise and transformation. Always—with God—there's more.

Why? Because, again, *God knows what can be*. What this means is that God has a vision for your life. I don't say plan because that's bad theology. In that scheme of things, we become robotic ... simply going through the motions of some pre-ordained plan that God had for our lives.

Certainly, everything that happens in life is not God's plan—not *meant to be*. If that were the case, how would we explain what a mess the world is in ... and on and on?

Rather than a plan, God has a *vision* ... a vision of possibilities. God can imagine how our lives *could* go if we use our freedom in good and faithful ways.

From this vantage point, *God knows what can be*. And God hopes and yearns that fruitful possibilities emerge.

And so the key in all of this is for us to have the imagination and the courage to *let the future speak*. Let it have a voice.

When the future has a voice, and when the values and vision of the future begin to inform the present, whatever we're caught up in at the moment is given a new face. And we begin to see what *can be* for our lives.

IV.

God's nature is invariably hopeful ... it is also overwhelmingly compassionate. **When the future speaks**, therefore, our spirits are lifted to the hope and promise that the future holds.

For this future to break through and become a reality, there's all kinds of *sorting out* that has to happen. *Fair enough*, we say. We can accept that our lives are not always easy and smooth sailing; we just want some reassurance that things are going to be okay.

By your endurance you will gain your souls, says Jesus.

That's what we want to hear.

We're willing to tough it out ... take our scrapes along the way ... and do what we have to do. But we need the reassurance that we're not alone and that our foundation and spiritually driven hopes for tomorrow are not in vain.

What's empowering about the *future* is that when the *voice of the future speaks*, possibilities open up. When the future speaks, our imagination lifts us out of the present—whatever it may be—and paints a picture of a new day.

What *can be* has power to set our priorities and our commitments for today.

When we begin to look at our lives from this vantage point, from the future back into the present, everything is reversed ... we gain new perspective. We begin to see how we can make certain constructive changes in our lives that can get us to where the future envisions us.

In this framework of our lives, everything is suddenly reversed. The future informs us; it literally tells us what we need to do today ... right now.

V.

In the recent, devastating fires in Southern California (by the way, we used to live—for 13 years—right there where some of the fires were the worst ... in the Poway, Rancho Bernardo area), the high-powered Santa Ana winds spread wildfires across the hills and into neighborhoods at breakneck speeds. In order to contact home-owners as quickly as possible, emergency evacuation officials put into effect a *reverse 9-1-1* operation.

I had never heard of such a thing; perhaps you have ... we have hurricane warnings here in Florida, of course, but it's not quite the same thing because the hurricanes can be forecast with much greater reliability.

Here's how the reverse *9-1-1* works. Instead of a panicked caller dialing a central *911* dispatch unit to report an emergency, the *911* operators themselves called thousands of residents warning them of the pending emergency. These *reverse 9-1-1* calls were used to evacuate whole neighborhoods as the fierce flames blew into towns and consumed thousands of homes.

The point for us in this is how the *reverse 9-1-1* serves as a *voice from the future* enabling people to DO in the present—right now—what the future knows will be in our best interest down the road.

When we allow the future to have a voice ... when we let the future speak ... when we begin to imagine what kind of a world we want, consistent with what we discern to be God's purposes, it gives us both vision and motivation to make whatever changes we need to make in the present (i.e., today) so that the envisioned future will unfold.

VI.

Our reading from Isaiah this morning is from **Third Isaiah**, the prophet of the period known as the *restoration*. This was a difficult historical period for Israel ... right after she had been allowed to return from Babylonian Exile back to Judah.

We can imagine the enormous challenges after 50 years in exile. Everything had changed. And it wasn't an easy transition at all. Along the way, understandably, people got discouraged.

In our own time, imagine what it might be like going back to Cuba after Castro, not that many would go back, but some might. Imagine the transition!! With regard to land ownership ... power arrangements ... life style ... infrastructure ... organizational structures ... economic concerns ... and on and on.

That's comparable to the experience the Israelites had upon returning to Judah. The prophet Isaiah offers them a word of hope.

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

- That's just what they need to hear. A new day is on the way. Their whole world, their present reality is going to be re-created and transformed. And so, hang in there ...

I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people ...Again, a new day is on the horizon. And so get beyond your worn-out assumptions ... and let go of the bad memories ... and stop whining and being negative about things ... and start to see and envision your life—your world—In new ways.

Listen to the empowering poetry of hope from **Third Isaiah ...**

For on such a day ... 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 ...

In other words, radical change is on the way.

And so, for all of us, let us *dare to imagine* a future that reflects the purposes of God! And let that *imagined future* speak to us today. For *God knows what can be.*

For your life and my life, that's GOOD NEWS; and it's up to us to *listen*, to *love*, and to remain *faithful*, remembering that ...

By your endurance you will gain your souls!.

All praise be unto God! Amen!

Dr. Jeffrey E. Frantz
Miami Lakes Congregational Church, *United Church of Christ*
6701 Miami Lakeway South
Miami Lakes, FL 33014
On the web at www.mlchurch.com