

Sermon - Something New
Sunday, November 13, 2016
Scripture Readings: Isaiah 65:17-25, II Thess. 3:6-13
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Our first scripture reading is Isaiah 65:17-25. Two generations had passed since their ancestors, with much rejoicing set out from Babylon to repopulate the city of David. There was still much distance between the vision of something new and the reality. In this despairing situation, however, certain individuals began to sing the old songs of joy and hope, but in a new key. The prophet's vision is of a transformed environment with peoples, habitations, and nature all woven into a complex relationship of wholeness and harmony. This peace will reflect the character of Israel's God. Listen to what the Spirit is saying.

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. Amen.

Our second scripture reading in II Thessalonians 3:6-13 reminds members within an early Christian community of the importance of working together for the good of all. Although the reality of their everyday life still fell short of Isaiah's vision, brothers and sisters are called to reflect the integrity of Christ by doing what is right. Listen to what the spirit is saying.

6 Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, 8 and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labor we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. 9 This was not because we do not have that right, but in order to give you an example to imitate. 10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. 11 For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. 12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. 13 Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.

The title of the sermon: “Something New”

Text: “Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.” II Thessalonians 3:13

Let us pray. Holy and loving God, may we not grow weary in doing our part to create your vision of wholeness and harmony. And now may the words of my mouth and the meditations and thoughts of each of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

It is fair to say that the “something new” for which Americans were hoping as a result of this week’s national election sounded different depending on each of our individual voices. In keeping with the theme of our Stewardship Campaign, as our chairperson George Preckwinkle commended, indeed we had “more than enough” politics by the time the vote took place. However, our reactions to the results of this unprecedented election are varied and strong. The division within our country, although not “something new,” is something we can no longer ignore. This morning as your pastor, I would like to recognize and honor the differing voices among us, and hopefully offer a word of comfort and solidarity that we may not grow weary in doing what is right.

Some within our family are disappointed and mourning the results of the election. The “something new” they had envisioned in the first woman president is not yet to be. Many women who have worked hard to crack glass ceilings, their mothers and grandmothers who fought for the right to vote and women’s rights along the way are weary and discouraged.

Other women within our family are equally progressive, however did not feel the democratic candidate was one for which they could vote.

Some within our family are frightened and feeling particularly vulnerable: Muslims, immigrants, refugees, people of color and those within same gender relationships. Will the privileges and rights which are something new for some continue to be a part of their future? Will the heightened rhetoric threaten their safety?

Others within our family are pleased with the results of the election. White, working class Americans who have felt left behind and on the outside with lost income and jobs feel their voice has finally been heard. For them, this is “something new.” They are hopeful, weary of working hard for very little or not working at all.

These are all voices that need to be heard and honored. As Isaiah affirms *Before they call God will answer, while they are yet speaking God will hear.* Let us continue to raise our voices with clarity and kindness, and let us respect and listen to the voices around us. When these differing voices and tones blend together, harmony is possible!

In light of Isaiah’s vision of the new creation which culminates in a scene of harmony with the wolf and the lamb together on God’s Holy Mountain not threatening one another and last week’s call to raise the simple melody of our lives into a full-voiced, glorious harmony, let us not be weary in working toward unity and wholeness.

In music, both the consonant and dissonant sounds, the major and minor chords are necessary to create a stimulating musical piece that moves us and nourishes our spirits. “Hallelujah” by Leonard Cohen who died this week created such a work of art with rich biblical imagery, for which we will be forever grateful. Likewise, part of the ebb and flow of life and human

relations has to do with experiencing both joy and sorrow, success and disappointment, highs and lows. When we are able to interact with one another in conflict, listen to one another's aspirations and fears without demonizing those with whom we disagree, we can resolve these conflicts over time and learn to blend our voices to create a rich, lasting harmony and peace.

Some of us remember the 1982 single hit "Ebony and Ivory" song by Paul McCartney and Stevie Wonder. The song reached number one on both the UK and the U.S. charts. On the surface, it is about the black and white keys on a piano, but on a deeper, human level the song addresses integration and racial harmony. McCartney's lyrics go:

*We All Know That People Are The Same Where Ever We Go.
There Is Good And Bad In Ev'ryone.
We Learn To Live,
We Learn To Give Each Other What We Need To Survive Together Alive.*

*Ebony and Ivory Live Together In Perfect Harmony
Side By Side On My Piano Keyboard,
Oh Lord, Why Don't We?*

The song "Ebony and Ivory" was banned in South Africa during the Apartheid era. The official reason was because Stevie Wonder accepted his 1984 Academy Award "in the name of Nelson Mandela" who was imprisoned at the time. Nelson Mandela would be released from prison in 1992, serve as President to South Africa, and be instrumental in healing the wounds which divided this country.

During this divisive time in our own country, let us gain wisdom and inspiration from the harmony metaphor. Rather than polarize or ignore those with whom we disagree, let us respect the different voices within our nation. If we learn to love our fellow Americans no matter what their political view, religious affiliation, or cultural background, we are working toward the "something new" which Isaiah prophesied in the fourth century BCE and which Christ embodied through the incarnation. As we wait for the peaceful kingdom, let us not grow weary in doing what is right and let us nourish our spirits along this journey to wholeness and harmony at the table of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.