

Proper 28 C Sermon
Isaiah 65:17-25
November 13, 2022

“Thy Kingdom Come”
Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

¹⁷For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. ¹⁸But 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. ¹⁹I 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. ²⁰No 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. ²¹They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ²²They 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. ²³They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD—and their descendants as well. ²⁴Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. ²⁵The 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.

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These verses are a hard act to follow. The prophet, known to scholars as Third Isaiah, promises that God is about to create, or is already creating, new heavens and a new earth and a great new city where weeping and cries of distress will be heard no more; where infants will be nurtured and live to adulthood and the aged will live long and well, more than a hundred

years; where those who build houses will inhabit them and those who plant will harvest for themselves; where humanity's cries are heard by God even before they're uttered; where the strong and the weak will live side by side; where violence and war will be no more—the veritable kingdom of God. I can scarcely imagine a more beautiful, a more hopeful, a more perfect word picture to describe the world I wish existed right here and right now.

Words are so powerful. They slay and they resuscitate, they chide and they praise, they shatter optimism and they lay the foundation for hope. The prophet knew this and her words were for a people in dire need of hope. You see, just a few decades earlier, Jerusalem had been destroyed and her people carried off to Babylon. The exiles had returned and had begun the hard work of rebuilding their city, rebuilding their temple, and rebuilding their lives, but there was hunger, there was hardship, there was injustice. Much of the city was still in shambles and the newly rebuilt temple, the heart of the city, was but a shadow of its former self. And so the prophet sang her expectant song against a backdrop of decay and disease and despair and perhaps, hope was born anew.

Have you ever needed hope to be born anew in you? Have we as a congregation ever needed hope to be born anew in us? Have we as communities, and as a nation, and as a world ever needed hope to be born anew in us? The prophet's words are for us too. "I am about to create, I am already creating, new heavens and a new earth," says God, "be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating."

This work of creation is never really done, is it? But you know something, neither is ours. Throughout the ancient myths and stories of the Bible, human beings share the ongoing creative process with the divine. In fact, in the Bible's second account of creation from Genesis 2, people are placed in a garden to care for it and tend it. And all the animals are brought before them to receive their names—an act of creation. Even the ancients understood that the work of creation was never the sole prerogative of the divine—it ours too, yours and mine and ours together.

I'm reminded of a story:

A new minister went to the home of a parishioner for a visit. Upon arriving, the minister discovered that his host was an avid gardener, and was only too delighted to show her new pastor around the garden, a magnificent sea of greens, purples, blues, whites, yellows and pinks. Wanting to set the relationship off on a strong, positive note, the pastor said, "Praise God for the beauty of God's handiwork!"

But his host replied in a somewhat offended tone, "Now pastor, don't go giving all the credit to God. You should have seen this garden when the Almighty was tending it alone!"¹

The truth is, this gardener's theology was sound. The authors of our sacred text believed that God created human beings to be co-creators in the ongoing work of creation. The work of creation is not God's alone, but yours and mine and ours together.

Every Sunday we say the Lord's Prayer and we pray "Thy kingdom come," but I wonder, do we actually expect it to happen? Furthermore, are we willing to help make it happen? To participate in creating it? But that really is, according to the ancient authors of scripture, exactly what we are created to do. We are invited to help shape the new heavens and a new earth and the great new city. We are invited to participate in turning weeping and distress into joy and celebration. We are invited to care for the young and the aged alike and to ensure that all have homes and all have food. We are invited to set a table where the strong and the weak, the rich and the poor, dine together. We are invited to broker peace. We are invited to be part of heaven's answer to the cries of the world. Truth be told, we aren't just invited to do these things, this is exactly what we exist to do!

¹ Adapted from <https://storiesforpreaching.com/>.

“I am about to create, I am already creating, new heavens and a new earth,” says the God of Third Isaiah. Will we join in this work? It’s exactly what scripture tells us we are created for. So, what does it actually look like to engage in this kind of creative work? Few human beings have the power to singlehandedly decrease infant mortality rates or cure the diseases of the aged. Few human beings have the power to singlehandedly house or feed all the world’s people who live in poverty. Few human beings have the ability to broker world peace or break down all the barriers of ethnicity, gender, and class. So, what does it actually look like to engage in the work of creating the kingdom?

Firstly, it looks like recognizing that we as individuals are not working alone. We’re joining the work of one who says, “I am about to create, I am already creating, new heavens and a new earth.” This is not our pet project, it’s God’s, and we’re called to join that work with our fellow human beings for the sake of the world. We’re not in this alone.

Secondly, it looks like recognizing that little things, done with heart, can have a big impact. No, we can’t feed all the world’s hungry or house all the world’s homeless, but can we support the Interfaith Food Pantry, Hesed House, or Mutual Ground? Can we join the Neighbor project in creating paths to home ownership or advocate for those with other needs by contacting our elected officials? By doing these little things with a big heart, we’re joining heaven in creating the kingdom on earth.

No, we can’t decrease infant mortality rates and cure the diseases of the aged, but can we take an interest in children? Can we teach Church School or volunteer with a school mentor? Can we donate books or school supplies? Can we befriend a senior citizen? Can we support school children and buy something from the angel tree? By doing these little things with a big heart, we’re joining heaven in creating the kingdom.

No, we can’t broker world peace or break down all the barriers of ethnicity, gender and class, but can we smile at a stranger, hold the door open for another, or carry someone’s groceries to their car? Can we have

a meaningful conversation with someone who doesn't look like us, pray like us, think like us? Can we pick up a book, watch a program that challenges our worldview or exposes us to a new culture or idea, or attend the Students of the Beloved Community's forum on unconscious bias? Can we resist the urge to make assumptions about others, to judge others, to assign categories to others? By doing these little things with a big heart, we're joining heaven in creating the kingdom.

Thirdly, and finally, engaging in the work of creating the kingdom looks like saying 'yes' to the divine invitation to join in creating this bold new world. Human beings have tremendous creative potential, but we have to be willing to use it.

Will we recognize that we're not called to create the kingdom alone, but to join heaven and humanity in the work? Will we commit to doing little things with a big heart to join in creating the kingdom? Will we say yes to the divine invitation to join in this work and do the very thing scripture tells us we are created to be about?

This week, I challenge each of us to consciously do one thing that we believe represents our 'yes' to the divine invitation to join in creating the kingdom—to do one thing to participate in the transformation of our world.

"I am about to create, I am already creating, new heavens and a new earth," says God, "be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating." May we truly be glad, may we be forever rejoicing, and may we join God in creating the kingdom, right here, right now, for all. Amen.