

Prayer of Preparation (responsive)

Leader: May the words of my mouth....

People: and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

The days are surely coming, says the prophet Isaiah, when we have a new heaven and a new earth. But what exactly does that mean?

What does it mean when we hear the prophet say, *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.*

Create Jerusalem as a joy? If the prophet writes that Jerusalem **will be** a joy, then I can assure you that Jerusalem, the place which Isaiah believes God resides, is the total opposite of joy. Jerusalem had become a place of hopelessness and sorrow. Imagine the place where God calls God's people to live and worship as a place of hopelessness and sorrow. The very thought of it makes me weep.

When I read Isaiah, in my imagination, Jerusalem has become a place where people don't worship, people don't love God, and people don't love their neighbors as they love themselves. When I read Isaiah, in my imagination, Jerusalem has become a place where everyone **knows** the 10 commandments but it's okay to kill, steal, and destroy. In my imagination, according to what Isaiah writes, Jerusalem has become a place which makes God weep.

But, says Isaiah, God is creating a new Jerusalem, a place where God is worshipped in spirit and in truth. God is creating a place where the people called by God **love** like God. God is creating a place where EVERYONE loves God and loves their neighbor. God is creating a new heaven and a new earth where we hear the truth of Genesis 1:27, *God created humans in his image, in the image of God God created them.*

The prophet Isaiah says that God is creating a new heaven and a new earth filled with so much joy that grief and sorrow do not exist. Hear again what Isaiah says, *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 who 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.*

In the new Jerusalem, God is creating a new heaven and a new earth where war does not exist because war is a product of hate. In the new Jerusalem, God is creating a new heaven and a new earth so filled with peace that the *wolf and the lamb shall feed together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox.* In the new Jerusalem, we will be restored.

You must ask yourself, “restored from what, pastor?” Restored from sin. Isaiah is telling us about a world not touched by sin. To be the people of the new Jerusalem, we must be free from sin.

It's sin, our sin, that leads to the brokenness of this world. The consequences of our sin are: war, poverty, hunger, homelessness, hopelessness, sorrow, hatred, prejudice, and self-centeredness.

We need a savior, we need Jesus, because it's only Jesus who can get us out of the mess we're in. Isaiah gives us a picture of the lives we'd live if we didn't sin. Long life. Peace. Good health. Unrelenting love. Love so long, love so deep, love so unrelenting that it just won't let us go. Here's how Isaiah says it, *They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the LORD.*

Here's my proclamation, God's love will fill all the broken places in our hearts. God's love will take hearts that are turned toward sin and turn them back to God. When our hearts are turned toward God we won't consider hurting our neighbors.

Isaiah says God hears us. God hears our words of longing for wholeness. And God hears our words that wound, divide, and separate. God hears it all. God hears and God sent us Jesus to help us turn our hearts toward God; to turn our hearts toward a new way of living and being that lifts our friends and neighbors out of despair into joy.

Response to the Word: Brothers and sisters in Christ, may God always find your words are ones of love made to unite us, uplift us, and heal all our broken pieces.