**The Glorious New Creation**

**Isaiah 65:17-25; Revelation 21:1-5**

10/26/14

Thought for Meditation

Does Jesus care when my heart is pained too deeply for mirth and song,

As the burdens press, and the cares distress, and the way grows weary and long?

Does Jesus care when my way is dark with a nameless dread and fear?

As the daylight fades into deep night shades, does He care enough to be near?

Does Jesus care when I’ve said good bye to the dearest on earth to me,

And my sad heart aches till it nearly breaks – Is it aught to Him? Does he see?

O yes, He cares – I know He cares! His heart is touched with my grief; when the

 days are weary, the long nights dreary, I know my Savior cares. *Frank Graeff*

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 Joy taught a class of under-privileged nine-year-old girls at an inner-city church. They were a wonderful group. They had all sorts of energy and questions. One child, however, was different from all the others. Her name was Raichla. The other girls talked and squirmed. Raichla sat very still. The other kids sang the songs with gusto, and Raichla sat silently, listening. The other girls often giggled, as only nine-year-olds can do. Raichla never laughed. She was always present, always listening, and always silent. No one knew for sure what had happened in her life, but all the adults assumed that she had experienced some sort of tragedy that left her timid, afraid, and withdrawn.

 One day Joy taught the class about heaven. She talked about the new heavens and the new earth that we heard about in both of our passages this morning. She talked about seeing God sitting on his throne. She talked about heaven as a place of beauty and joy and said that God would wipe away every tear so that no one was ever sad again. As she talked she noticed that Raichla was listening very intently. After a few minutes Raichla raised her hand. “Miss Joy?” Everyone was stunned. No one had ever heard her ask a question before. “Yes Raichla?” “I was wondering if there was a place in heaven for girls like me?”

At some point in our lives we all ask that question. “Is there a place in heaven for me?” Our question may not be as blatant as Raichla’s, but I think we have all wondered if God really knows me and loves me. God is so busy running the universe – does he have time to pay attention to me? God is focused on the big problems of the world. God is working on how to stop the wars and violence and terrorism. God has enough to do in dealing with Ebola and all the problems of the world. Isn’t God too busy to think about me?

 These questions are not primarily intellectual problems. They develop out of the brokenness of our lives. We grow up learning “God is great. God is good.” but then life happens, and we start to question who God is and what God does. The brokenness of our lives is different for all of us. It may be a 14-year-old girl whose heart is broken by the love of her life, or a 27-year-old man who can’t find a job and is struggling with substance abuse, a 42-year-old putting his or her life back together after a divorce, or someone grieving the death of a loved one. What I want you to hear this morning is that when we go through a time of brokenness, not “if” but “when,” there is a word from God that brings us hope and peace and joy. Let’s look at our Bible passages.

The passage in Isaiah is one of the most positive and uplifting passages in the Bible. It is filled with hope and joy. But to really understand this passage we need to know about the context, what was probably happening in the life of the Israelites, the people of Yahweh.

 In the 6th century BC Babylon was the main world power. The kingdom of Judah was an insignificant little country. They tried to stand up to Babylon but they were no match for Nebuchadnezzar and his army. In 587 BC the Babylonians broke through the walls of Jerusalem. They captured the King of Judah. They killed his sons right in front of him and then they poked out his eyes so that the last thing he saw was he sons being murdered. The Babylonians destroyed the city of Jerusalem and desecrated the Temple which the Israelites believed was the holy place where God lived. And then the Babylonians took the Israelites away from the Promised Land, into exile. For 70 years they lived in exile, until almost everyone who had been living had died off. Then Cyrus, the King of Persia, overthrew the Babylonians and allowed the people of Israel to return to the Promised Land.

 They went back with great hope. They hoped to return to their former glory, but that never works. You can’t go back to the good old days. The city of Jerusalem and the Temple of God had been destroyed. At best, when they went back, Jerusalem was a second, or third-rate city. There were many people living in and around Jerusalem who had some semblance of the Israelite faith. They took seven out of the Ten Commandments and a few other teachings from the Law, blended them with some beliefs from Babylon and some from Egypt. They added in a few other ideas and combined them all into a very convenient and easy faith. They called themselves Israelites, but they weren’t really faithful and obedient to the God of Israel.

 On the other hand, there was a small remnant who were faithful to Yahweh, who clung to the God of Abraham, the God of Moses and Elijah. As best they could they tried to follow the law. They weren’t very popular. In fact, they were outcasts and oppressed. They were discouraged and afraid. They were broken. Into that small community of people who had survived the exile, yet were still living without any real hope, Isaiah spoke a message of hope and joy.

 He talked about a glorious new creation. The old one was so messed up it couldn’t be saved so God created a new heavens and a new earth, a new Jerusalem that will be filled with joy. Part of that joy is because everything is “new and improved.” Part of it is because God delights in his people. I love that idea. God delights in you. God is crazy in love with us. When God thinks of you it brings him joy.

Isaiah described something of what that new creation will be like. Infants won’t die and everyone will live a long life. Justice will be a reality. Verse 24 says that not only will God answer our prayers; he knows us so well that before we even pray he knows what we need and has answered our prayers. Verse 25 points to relationships of peace. Wolves, lambs, lions, serpents, all creatures will live together in harmony.

In Revelation 21 John picks up on these images and develops them. He affirms that God is making everything new, but he adds several new ideas.

John talks about the new Jerusalem as a beautiful bride. I heard one pastor say that he had done lots of weddings and he had never seen a bride who wasn’t beautiful. Some of the grooms may not have been so great, but the brides were all gorgeous.

 The second new idea is that God lives with us. “The home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them” (Revelation 21:3 NRSV). Our God is not an absent or distant God. God lives with us. That is what the Incarnation is all about – God with us. That is what Pentecost is all about – the Holy Spirit is God with us. God is right here in this church.

Third, John tells us that in this new creation there will be no sorrow. God “will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more” (Revelation 21:4 NRSV).

 I’m aware that many people struggle with the book of Revelation. No one really understands it and there are many weird and sometimes scary ideas. I think part of that problem is because we tend to take it too literally. John, like Isaiah before him, used poetic language to paint a picture. They were not trying to give us details of what heaven is like. They are trying to create images that are intended to fill us with hope and peace and joy.

A few months ago I was working out in my yard. We live on a hill and I had gone part way down the hill and saw a board, a two-by-six. I picked it up to see if it was any good. Underneath I found a colony of bugs. The top of the board looked pretty good. But underneath there were lots of creepy, crawly things and the back of the board was rotting.

 In some ways I think that describes our lives. On the surface we look okay. We put on masks and pretend that we are fine. But underneath and behind, there are many things rotting away. We have secrets that we can’t let anyone know. We have struggles that keep us from the abundant life we want. We have fears that keep us awake at night. There is brokenness in our lives. And because the church is made up of people who are broken, there is brokenness in the church.

 Over the past few weeks I’ve started hearing some of the stories of the brokenness that has been going on here in Sharon. To be honest with you, one of the things that attracted me to this church was that when I interviewed with the search committee they didn’t pretend that everything was okay. They admitted that there was a problem. The first step in the healing process is admitting that we are broken. *Turn to someone next to you and say “You are broken.” Some of you are enjoying doing that too much. Now say to that same person, “I am broken too.”* All of us are broken and sinful people.

 My hope for the Sharon church is not that this will become a perfect place filled with perfect people. It isn’t that Sharon will return to the glory that it had back in the 1960’s and 1970’s. That will not work. My hope is that the Sharon church will be a place where broken people are able to experience the healing presence of God. My hope is that Sharon will be a place in which people hear the good news that God is doing something new, and that God invites us to live in that new creation, with hope and peace and joy.

Friends, the good news for us today is that in Jesus Christ God is creating something that is brand new, within us and around us, in our own lives and in the life of the Sharon church. I don’t know what that creation will look like. No one does. What we do know is that this is God’s church. God is with us and this new creation is a gift from God. God is creating something new and invites us to live in that glorious new creation with hope, and peace, and joy.