

“Dying and Living Into a New Vision”  
Easter Sunday  
April 4, 2010

Isaiah 65:17-25  
Luke 24:1-12

Hear again the Word as Isaiah proclaimed it so long ago:  
Thus says the Lord God:  
I am about to create new heavens and a new earth.  
And in these new heavens and new earth, no more shall the sound  
of weeping or the cry of distress be heard.  
The people shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant  
vineyards and eat their fruit.  
No longer shall the people shall build and another inhabit; no  
longer shall they plant and another eat.  
They shall not labor in vain.  
They shall not bear children destined for calamity.  
They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the  
Lord.

On this Easter Sunday, Isaiah brings us a vision, a vision of new heavens and a new earth ... a vision of abundance, of justice, of true peace. On this day of resurrection and rejoicing, Isaiah brings us an ancient vision of a new earth. In truth, he brings us an old vision that is still a *vision* and not a reality. He brings us an old vision that remains unrealized, unfulfilled, and, maybe, just maybe, unbelievable.

And on this Easter Sunday, millions of Christians around the world gather to proclaim that Christ has risen, to sing hymns of victory over death, and to declare that, through Christ, God has reconciled humanity to Godself.

Ancient proclamations repeated; ancient stories retold and reclaimed. Declarations and promises of newness, salvation, and reconciliation made far and wide, year after year. What celebration, what joy! But is any of it *true*? Is any of it believable? Can we put our faith in it? Can we trust our lives to Isaiah’s vision and Luke’s story of resurrection?

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It was twenty-five hundred years ago that Isaiah proclaimed the word of God had come to him, saying, “I am about to create a new earth, a new earth in which no one will labor for another’s profit and leisure, a new earth in which no one will bear children for calamity.”

So where is this new earth that God was “about to create” 2500 years ago? Can we honestly say that the new earth has come and children no longer face calamity?

Can you imagine declaring the coming of the new heavens and the new earth while standing in Port au Prince or sub-Saharan Africa, in the slums of Rio de Janeiro or the subways of Moscow, in the middle of an Indian reservation without gambling’s income (and curses), or in the poorest counties and cities in the United States?

Can you imagine standing in any of those places and seeing the thousands upon thousands – millions – of children orphaned by poverty, earthquakes, AIDS, and war?

Can you imagine seeing the thousands upon thousands of children who are malnourished, without access to even the most basic medical care, not given the chance to go to school, unable to envision a life beyond poverty, unaware that they are God's beloveds?

Can you imagine yourself standing in any of those places and announcing, not only that God has been creating a new earth in which children are no longer be born into calamity, but also that, in the resurrection, God in Christ has vanquished death, sin, and brokenness?

Can you imagine it? I confess, I find it hard – very hard – to imagine myself standing in any of those places and then telling any of those children that God has been creating a new earth of no hurt and no destruction for at least the last 2500 years. I find it hard, very hard, to imagine standing in the midst of misery, poverty, need, and despair and telling those hungry children, “Rejoice! Rejoice! Christ is risen!”

Maybe you, too, find it difficult to imagine believing and speaking this message of newness, promise, and resurrection in the midst of injustice, deep human need, and profound suffering. And if you and I do find it difficult, what are we to make of our reluctance, our uneasiness as we try to imagine sharing the Good News of Christianity, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in places where some would say it is needed the most?

Believe it or not, there may actually be good news in our reluctance to declare the Good News. Perhaps the trouble that at least some of us have with the idea of announcing God's promise of a new earth in places of pain and despair isn't a bad thing. Perhaps our hesitance isn't a sign of an immature faith. Perhaps it's not a sign of anything negative at all.

Consider this possibility. Perhaps the unease many of us have with the notion of telling the world about God's new earth and Christ's resurrection is actually a gift of God's grace. Perhaps our reluctance to announce the gospel is a sure sign that the Holy Spirit is indeed at work within us. Perhaps it's God's way of helping us realize that we're not called to *announce* God's vision of a new earth, but that we are called, instead, to *live* that vision. Perhaps our unease is a signal that we're not called to *announce* that Christ is risen, but that we're called, instead, to *live* the Easter vision of resurrection and redemption, to *live* the Easter vision of love and forgiveness.

So instead of trying to imagine standing, say, in Haiti or the Wind River Indian Reservation and *announcing* a vision of a resurrected, redeemed, beloved new earth, try to imagine *living* into that vision in Haiti, Wind River, the Tenderloin, or Boyes Hot Springs. Try to imagine *living* into that vision here in this congregation and in your own home.

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As we try to imagine living into God's vision of a new earth of, what do we see and what do we learn? How do we become a people through whom God is turning a vision of true Shalom into a flesh and blood reality? How are we to *live*, so that we become a people rooted in the very power of the Christ who lives on after Jesus' death on the cross? How do we become a people rooted in the resurrection power of life over death, the resurrection power of love over fear and hatred, the resurrection power of service over self-seeking, the resurrection power of forgiveness over violence and greed?

Listen again to the words from Isaiah. In this new earth, the people shall build houses and inhabit them. They shall plant and eat the fruit of what they have planted. No longer shall they build and another inhabit. No longer shall they plant and another eat.

So we are called to live into a vision in which the toil of many no longer leads to the wealth of a few. We are called to live into a vision in which the ones who build, who plant, who tend the sick, who clean and cook are no longer denied a place of their own, no longer denied a place at the table, no longer denied the respect and love they deserve as God's beloveds.

We are called, not to announce Good News, but to be Good News. We are called to see our brothers and sisters in Haiti as they truly are, beloved creations of God who have, for generations, lived under the crushing debt and economic exploitation that replaced slavery once the slaves had the gall to fight for their freedom and win. We are called to live into God's vision of a new earth by choosing to honor their humanity as much as we honor our own. We are called to live into God's vision by choosing to cherish Haiti's children as much as we cherish our own.

We are called to live into this ancient yet new vision of abundance and new life by daring to trust the power of love and self-giving over the power of judgment and greed. We are called to live into this vision of a new earth, of resurrection and reconciliation, by daring to trust the power of grace and forgiveness over the power of violence and fear. We are called to live into this vision by following the path that Jesus took throughout the countryside and then to the cross -- a path of courage, of healing, of grace, of prayer, and of love.

There's a hitch, though. Even if we're prepared to live into this vision of justice, redemption, and love more fully, there's something else we need to be prepared to do. Before we can live into that vision, we must first die to other visions of human life and reality.

We are called to die to the cynicism and the fear that tell us that resurrection is a lie, that redemption is impossible, that the only vision for the future is a vision in which indifference, selfishness, injustice, and violence are inevitable. We are called to die to the belief that things will remain the same. We are called to die, in the words of Benjamin Sparks, to the conviction that the powerful will always crush the innocent; the fearful will always find a scapegoat to assuage their anxiety; the energetic followers will always run away at the moment of crisis; and the one who proclaims his loyalty and courage the loudest will always deny the truth in his heart when he is in danger.

We are called to die to the self-righteousness and arrogance that can plague progressive congregations, as well as fundamentalist congregations.

We are called to die to the narrowness of heart and mind that tells us that our comforts and our lives of material abundance are our due, no matter what they cost in the lives of other people or in the life of the earth itself.

We are called to die to the lie that some parts of creation are more important than others, the lie that some people are more worthy of love and blessing than others.

On this Easter morning and on every morning, we are called to die to fear and self-centeredness, so that we can live into a vision of a new earth and a new life. We are called to die to a culture that values consumption over compassion, so that we can live into a vision of a love that knows no end and a forgiveness that can reconcile and heal the world.

On this Easter morning, let us join Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women in daring to go to the tomb into which violence, injustice, and indifference seek to imprison God's creation. Let us join those women in daring to

look into the tomb, so that we can discover with them that the reconciling love of God is more powerful than the greatest human brokenness and sin.

Let us join those women in daring to *live* the Good News that not even death can contain the power and blessing of God's love.

Christ is risen!

May the risen Christ find a home in our hearts, our hopes, and in our very lives.

Amen.

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