

**SERMON – 5/3/23**  
**'A New Creation'**

Isaiah 65:17-25

The LORD says, "I am making new heavens and a new earth. The events of the past will be completely forgotten. Be glad and rejoice forever in what I create. The new Jerusalem I make will be full of joy, and her people will be happy." (Isaiah 65:17-18)

If I might begin by painting a rather gloomy picture for a moment, it would be by drawing attention to the fact that in this world there is no end of trouble. Amongst our fellowship this morning there will be some who are burdened by a heavy load of some kind – grief at the death of a loved-one, ill-health to contend with, anxiety over personal issues or work-related problems or family members or friends. Within this last week, how many of us have shed a tear or felt the weight of some sadness? Or, lifting our eyes beyond the four walls of the church this morning and looking out over the community of Kinross, how much pain and anguish is experienced around us day by day, or across the country how many people are suffering hardship because of the economic climate, or in the wider world how many of our brothers and sisters go hungry today or watch a loved-one suffer or even perish for lack of medicine or sanitation or shelter, or because of the war and conflict raging around them?

I highlight these things not to depress you but to define the context into which God speaks to us this morning, for it is into this broken, tear-streaked world that we hear God's promise given through Isaiah of new heavens and a new earth, a promise perhaps made more famous in the closing chapters of the Book of Revelation in John's recounting of his vision of that new heaven and a new earth... the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God... God Himself abiding with His people and, in place of death and grief and crying and pain, the right to drink from the spring of the water of life.

The world into which Isaiah and John proclaimed the full and final promise of God was no different from our world – perhaps, even, things were worse in those days. Isaiah was speaking in the old

Jerusalem at a time when armies were circling and foreign powers threatening its very existence. And when John caught sight of his vision, he himself was in prison on the island of Patmos, a prisoner because of his faith, a victim like many others of his fellow-believers at the time of the fierce persecutions in the Roman Empire.

What these characters of old saw and proclaimed was not just a wishful hope to bring comfort to struggling believers in difficult times, and nor are these just comfortable words for us to console ourselves with today in the face of a much crueller reality. Hear the Word of God – there is hope! It is of the essence of the Gospel of Christ that death is overcome by life, swallowed up by victory, that weakness and suffering never have the last word, and that in the purposes of God this fallen world is bound to be transformed.

But let's draw breath and let's take a closer look at this morning's reading. As we have said throughout the course of these studies, there is scholarly disagreement about whether the Book of Isaiah as we have it today is the work of one, two or even multiple writers. The early chapters are addressed to the people of Jerusalem as they face invasion in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC and the message is that they will be spared this time but that another force will overcome them in the future if they continue to trust in human saviours rather than in the Lord their God. The later chapters are undoubtedly different in that they are speaking about the further distant future when God's people are indeed carried off into exile in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC and later brought home again to the Promised Land. I personally am quite prepared to accept that one person was inspired by God to proclaim a message both for his contemporaries and for those who would come after them, for there are powerful themes developed throughout the entire book, but I don't think it makes much difference if the book as we have it is attributed by an editor who has woven together the work of more than one writer.

The fact of the matter is that this book is also God's living and active Word to *us* more than two and a half thousand years later calling us to trust God in our day, and we cannot ignore the fact that the book is also about the coming of the Messiah, who in

Isaiah's time was yet to appear but who was revealed many centuries later in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Some even call Isaiah the fifth Gospel, such is the extent of what is imparted to us here about the person and the work of Christ. And as I suggested earlier, it is not only possible to trace the thread of a message through the whole Book of Isaiah, there is a thread that holds together the whole Bible as 'God's Big Picture' is unveiled for us to grasp His eternal purposes of grace right from Genesis to Revelation.

Here in Isaiah and at the close of the Book of Revelation we are told of God's cosmic promise to create new heavens and a new earth, a kind of physical representation of what is elsewhere in the Scriptures envisioned as the Kingdom of God. And in today's reading, Isaiah describes some of the transformations that will be evident in this 'new creation'.

Instead of weeping, crying and mourning, there will be gladness and rejoicing in God's new creation.

Instead of building homes and other people occupying them and planting vineyards and other people harvesting the fruit, people will build homes and live in them themselves and will plant vines and drink the wine themselves.

Instead of a world where there is harm and destruction, Isaiah returns to a picture he painted right back in chapter 11 and speaks of the wolf lying down with the lamb, of lions eating straw like cattle and of the snake being disarmed.

Throughout history, foretastes of this ultimate future have been given as God's people have come through dark valleys to green pastures – the people of Jerusalem in Isaiah's own day, their exiled descendants who were brought back home again from Babylon, in countless other acts of salvation over the centuries, but supremely in Jesus Christ who took the sin of the world to the cross and triumphed over it by taking it to the grave and rising again to new life. Here this morning as we break bread and share a cup of wine we here today are called to take hold by faith of Christ Himself and all His benefits, not least this promise that through Him we will one day be part of the new heavens and the new earth.

For now, when the things of this world often threaten to submerge us and we may sometimes find ourselves clinging on to God by nothing more than our fingertips, the promise of God gives us the confidence and the motivation – what we call faith – to cling like limpets to the Rock that is Christ and to the victory that is His death and rising again, and by so doing to see through and above and beyond the struggles and the suffering of this life and of our mortal humanity to claim the promise of new heavens and a new earth even when this world is throwing its worst at us; to claim the promise of God-with-us even when God seems utterly remote and beyond our grasp; to claim the promise of no more death even in the face of our own mortality, to claim the promise of no more grief even when the emptiness of bereavement causes us to ache within and causes the tears to stream down our faces; to claim the promise of no more pain even when in body or mind or soul we writhe in agony. And to live out the ways of the Kingdom here and now as a witness that will point others too to the One in whom they may take hold of the promise – Jesus Christ.

“I am the Resurrection and the Life,” said Jesus to grief-stricken Martha, “do you believe this?” And He asks us too – do you believe this? Christ is risen, the church proclaims, and in faith we are called to respond, ‘He is risen indeed!’ If the Gospel is true, as I believe with all my heart it is, then the consequences are staggering not only when in the purposes of God all things will reach their conclusion, but also right here and now, even when things seems to be at their lowest ebb, and we can rest in the One through whom the making of the promise is the guarantee of its fulfilment.

What Isaiah wrote all those years ago about the purpose of God is the Good News we are called to share with a broken world that is in such desperate need of hope: ‘See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice for ever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few

days, or an old man who does not live out his years; the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child.'

Draw near to the Table, my friends. Take and eat, take hold of Christ, take hold of the promise, then live. Truly live.