

Isaiah 65: 17-25

Luke 21: 5-19

November 10, 2016

Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church

This morning we hear two texts which are both remarkably similar a remarkably different. God through the prophet Isaiah speaks hopeful words to the exiles in Babylon. Not only will the devastated city of Jerusalem along with the Temple be rebuilt it will be part of a grand transformation of life—*new heavens and a new earth*. What Isaiah *does not* mean is that there will be a physical change in the universe. All will be as it was—the good creation which God made in the beginning.

What will be different? The transformation will occur because the *relationships between God, creation and humanity will be restored to their proper balance*. The heavens and the earth will not physically change; but the way we look upon them, ourselves, each other and the God will be wonderfully altered. We will look upon creation with the eyes of the Creator. Our hearts will beat with the love of the Creator. In this new state of being there will be no anxiety, dread, anger, fear.

There will be no jealousy of others or resentment and the destructive behavior that comes when our relationship with God is distorted.

I propose to you the vision God gave to Isaiah is the same as the one Jesus proclaimed: the Kingdom of God. Yet, as with God's vision through Isaiah, this Kingdom will not merely be a nostalgic recreation of the way things were when life was simple and you knew where you stood. There is a reason why God placed angels with flaming swords at the entrance to the Garden of Eden. That original state of innocence can never be restored. It cannot be recreated by going backwards. The Kingdom as preached by Jesus is a *present* reality. It is in our midst and it is within us. It is our spiritual home *into which we grow*. As a child goes out and returns home year after year often changed by life, it is home to which she or he returns. As time goes on we learn that home is not an address. It is a sacred space where we feel connected to the larger world and to the God who caused us to be born to our parents. It goes with us wherever we go.

As Christians we believe that Jesus not only proclaimed the Kingdom of God, he was, and *is* the complete demonstration of a life fully alive in the Kingdom. As Paul tells the Colossians, “In him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.” Therefore we have one task, and that is to follow Jesus wherever he leads. Jesus is the one who links us with the continuity of God’s love in creating the heavens and the earth. He links us with the great vision which God spoke through Isaiah.

All this is background for the incident which Luke presents in today’s gospel lesson. Jesus and his disciples are in the Temple which was rebuilt after the great exile four centuries earlier. He is near the end of his ministry. He knows that he will be arrested, tortured and crucified. He trusts, but cannot know absolutely that God will raise him from the dead. That after all is *God’s* job. Jesus never claimed to be able to raise himself.

Just before the passage we heard, Jesus has pointed out the people coming to put money in the Temple treasury. He is unimpressed

with the wealthy people who give large sums. He is very impressed with a poor widow who puts in just two copper coins.

Almost immediately after pointing this out to the disciples, Jesus overhears comments about what an awesome building the Temple is. They marvel at the beautiful stones embedded in the walls and the silver and gold symbols of faith that adorn the Temple. Jesus cuts them short. “These things that impress you so much: The time is coming when like Solomon’s Temple; it will become a pile of rubble.”

What follows is a teaching about the end time which sounds like nearly every description in scripture. And it comes with the same warning that we heard from Paul last week in his second letter to the Thessalonians: the time is not yet.

To me the message of Jesus is clear. The disciples and the crowds are too impressed by a structure built with human hands. Houses of worship are important because they provide a space for us to remember that God is the most important reality of our lives. They invite us to become intentional about setting aside time to recognize

that all life is in God's hands and that every human being belongs to a loving Creator. When we gather in a house of worship God wants us to experience a moment of peace that comes from realizing that *God*, not you and me, is responsible for life.

Yet the real function of any house of worship is to help us to experience God's love *beyond* its walls. We are meant to leave formal worship in a sanctuary and continue worship in our daily living. This is why Jesus with great feeling tells those gathered, "*You are my witnesses!*" And by this he means, *you are my witnesses to the great reality of God's Kingdom! You are the ones who by your faith and life tell the world that while there are wars and rumors of wars; while there is violence and disease and injustice, life is a gift. God exists, unchanging.* God encompasses the past present and future. He has sent Jesus into the world so that we can find grace, mercy and hope and live *today—right now!*

This is the witness of the widow. Unlike the wealthy people who give large sums to maintain the Temple but who will not have to

change their lifestyles, the widow has *given* such a portion of her wealth that she *must live day by day completely dependent on God. She therefore is a living model of what it means to witness to the kingdom.*

Friends, as important as it may be to balance the church budget, pay staff and give to mission, the survival of the institution we call Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church is not to be what motivates us to give. On this day when we dedicate our pledges of money, time and talents, it is our witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ and our desire to be a living witness to God's kingdom in our life together and in our lives beyond these walls that matters most. Let us be less impressed with our generosity than with *God's* generosity. Let us be less impressed with what we are doing in the world than what God in Christ is doing in us and through us to show forth God's kingdom here, on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.