

Isaiah 65:17-25 ¹⁷ "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. ¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ "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; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach {20 Or the sinner who reaches} a hundred will be considered accursed. ²¹ They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ²² No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands. ²³ They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them. ²⁴ Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. ²⁵ The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the LORD.

Rejoice and Be Glad Forever in God's New Creation

Friday afternoon I watched Alice have her first experience with the backyard puddle tub that we get out on hot days for Cedar to have water to cool off in while she's retrieving. And, I've got to tell you how really neat God is when it comes to giving us sermon fodder. God is so really neat! Alice sat there on the patio, reeeeeaching over into the tub and splashing. Sometimes she'd pull herself up to standing and reeeeeach to far in and almost face plant into the water, but somehow she would manage to keep herself dry. The funniest thing was when Cedar would come and lay down in the tub. Alice seemed to think this was the funniest thing she'd ever seen. She'd just start her little donkey like laugh and not stop until Cedar got out again. If only all of life could be like that.

Anyway, I was at the time taking a break from thinking about this sermon and wondering what in the world I was going to say this Easter morning that I hadn't already. In the Lectionary passages that had to choose from for this morning the Isaiah passage was the one that was drawing me. So, before I had the opportunity to watch Alice do her puddle tub thing I had been pouring over that passage and pouring over it and pouring over it waiting for the word to come. Finally, it did. "Be glad and rejoice in what I am creating." God was telling his people who had just a few years back returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon. Unfortunately, things weren't some sort of a magical, joyful, and glorious as they thought they would be. Therefore God spoke to them saying, "I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating". The NIV says what "I will create". No other translation does that. It is to be rightly read, "Be glad and rejoice in what I *am* creating." "Be glad and rejoice in what *I am creating*." God goes on to describe a world that's free of futility; where baby's aren't born just to die of catastrophe, where people live long full lives, where when you build a house someone else won't take it from you, when you can plant a vineyard, somebody else won't enjoy it's fruit, where work won't be toilsome anymore. Indeed, God says, you will wear out your hands for enjoying your work so much. God even says that in this New Creation predation among animals will no longer exist. The wolf and the lamb will feed together. The lion will eat straw like the ox. No one will kill or destroy on God's Holy Mountain upon which Jerusalem was located anymore.

With the exception of the cessation of predation, God was describing a world where people don't come from lands far away, raze your city, kill your babies, kill your young people, and carry everybody else away into captivity so that someone else comes to live in your house and eat the produce of the land you sowed prospering from the work of your own bloody knuckles. Rather, God was telling them to rejoice and be glad because a world free of the futility that war brings is what he was creating for them in their midst by bringing them home to Jerusalem. They can now forget the past and build towards the future. Rejoice and be glad even though you who came to live in and around Jerusalem have to have continual conflict with the squatters who lived there while you rebuild the city and the temple. Despite that, God was doing for his repatriated exiles something as momentous as making a new heaven and a new earth as the rebuilt.

Well, back to Alice, what joy she had. It makes me just want to go, "Yes, Jesus ahs Won!" As I watched her, it just struck me that so much of what she is experiencing right now is brand new to her. It might as well be new heavens and a new earth to her. She was just so...joyful. Overcome with it, fixated in it. Even when she finally did do the face plant into the tub, and the water was not warm, she didn't cry. It was like she didn't know what to do. It was the first time any such thing had happened to her. The things that Alice does with her hands in these early years cannot in any way know be futile. She's just learning to use her hands, discovering what she can do with them; and, praise God, it is amazing to watch. It's just a shame that we can't remember those first couple of years of life that were so filled with wonder.

For us now, it would be great if we could rejoice and be glad because God is creating things anew for us just as everything now is new for Alive. Unfortunately, for us now, we've come to know futility. Our work can so often be toilsome and...for what? So much of what we do isn't working towards anything. It benefits nobody other than being profitable for those we work for. Most of our work is working for something – like paying off debt or a mortgage or an education. It's not the work of creating a world where no one hurts or destroys anymore. And, God help us, we know predation. People use us for what they want. And not just other people, but we do it. No matter how kindly and gently we try to walk through this life, it's still a dog-eat-dog world out there and sooner or latter we have to eat some dog. Where's the joy in that? Where's the wonder of even the most mundane things being

new. You know, Alice was just so enthralled with that puddle tub; so much that when Dana dumped out the dirty water yesterday she got really mad. The little girl's got quite a temper. Don't mess with my new creation!

Well, friends, Jesus is alive. He has been raised from the dead. A new Big Bang has happened. In Jesus' resurrection God has begun to create new heavens and a new earth. Be glad...and'...rejoice in what God is creating. Are you ready for some truth? By the gift of the Holy Spirit we each have been changed to be able to participate in what God is now creating...the New Creation of this old soured Creation. Paul writes at the end of 1 Corinthians 15: "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain." Our labour in the Lord is not in vain. The things we do in him will continue on in him into the New Creation. When we work for forgiveness and reconciliation, we labour for the Lord so that those reconciled relationships will continue into the New Day. When we strive for justice, the justice and peace that arises will continue on. When we do acts of love, extravagant, wasteful love, for Jesus sake, the gratitude we awaken will endure. When we proclaim the Gospel, whether in word or in deed, the Holy Spirit will awaken faith in others that will endure. When we worship, the hearts of adoration that worship fosters will endure. When we work to bring forth beauty and joy, the wonder and the awe beauty instills will continue on.

You know, I'm grateful to live in the country. I happen to think that haymaking is one of the most wonderful works of art. To me, there is just nothing like the orderly beauty of new-made round bails in a freshly cut field. Nothing says fulfilling your created purpose of having dominion over the world like a well-groomed hayfield. I truly do believe that in the New Creation there will still be hay to make.

The New Life of Jesus resurrected humanity has been poured into us with the gift of the Holy Spirit. As Paul wrote: "If any one is in Christ, there is a new creation." What we do, anything we do if it is centred on him is New Creation work. Therefore go to work expecting him to make your work New Creation work. And if it is the case he is doing that; Be glad and rejoice in the fact that God is making all things new by means of you. Amen.