

Sermon November 13, 2016 On All My Holy Mountain Cara B. Hochhalter

Isaiah 65:17-25 and Luke 21:5-19

I was attempting to write this sermon on Friday in the church office because I love all the commotion that happens on the day before Holiday Village. As Cheryl pointed out for me...it is the perfect example of community coming together...in such joy...to create something positive...indeed, so many of you were there either setting up for the silent auction, getting ready to make the lunch, putting prices on the Treasures, helping artists arrange their crafts, hanging signs, with Nancy Thane watching over all and some of you at home baking. What a beautiful community working together for a greater good.

And thank you to all who came and shared your spirit of friendship and music galore for our guests....it was a joyous occasion.... perhaps a hint of the kind of new creation Isaiah imagined...

Let us be in prayer: God of promise, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts together, be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer.

Isaiah had a vision for a new creation...new heavens and a new earth. Now think about when this was that such a hopeful message was given. It was about 475 BCE. Two generations after the Jewish elite in Israel had been exiled and then returned to try to rebuild their devastated city of Jerusalem.

Imagine Isaiah walking through the rubble of the destruction, much as we see Syrians walking through Aleppo today...or in the earthquake ravaged villages of Italy.

How could they ever rebuild? Jerusalem was still in ruin, hunger was rampant, and economic injustice abounded. They must have looked to their prophets, much like we look for hope in our own days.... And Isaiah, this prophet who knew God in his heart, told them to hold on; God had given him a vision of something new....Soon, they would not even remember the horrible things they had been through...their city was about to be filled with joy and its people a delight!...Children would live full lives and the elderly into their hundreds!

Isaiah says that all be able to build their *own* houses and plant their *own* food...that the work will not just be done for others to inhabit or eat...but now the people would

be able to enjoy the work *of their own hands*. Tells us something about the conditions they must have come from.

Perhaps we take for granted this joy of being able to make and build for ourselves...so much of what we use is made by someone else these days, but Isaiah sees this ability to work as a fulfillment of God's dream for all people...to be able to sustain ourselves through our own efforts, together in community.

And Isaiah says this beautiful thing: that like the days of a tree, shall the days of my people be. Long lasting, fruitful, part of an ecology where each part supports the other...Remember that a single oak tree supports over 500 different creatures. Like the days of a tree, shall the days of my people be....each day productive and useful.

And God tells Isaiah that their work shall not be in vain...that their children will not be born into calamity...the wolf and the lamb shall feed together....and they shall not hurt or destroy *on all my holy mountain*.

On all my holy mountain. What a vision for our entire earth as "holy mountain"...this land we stand on...*holy mountain*.

Stephen Reid describes this vision as *God's project*. To call it a dream, makes it seem unrealistic, a fantasy, something from which we wake up and it disappears. *God's project* may not sound poetic...but it does imply that we can join together to work for its fulfillment.

Walter Brueggemann calls Isaiah's words, *God's intention*: He writes:"Post-exilic Israel was looking at rubble: so are we. Israel may have felt overwhelmed and threatened by empires and forces they couldn't influence, let alone control: we feel overwhelmed, too. Israel worried about its children and lamented their deaths as well as the wasted lives of those who toil in vain, we worry and lament, too. However," writes Brueggemann, "it's right in the midst of such despair-inducing circumstances that God speaks and moves. Caring, healing communication is possible.and that is the song of the promises and the image of the poets, the voices of Moses and of Jesus, that a new world is possible, and we can trust ourselves to it and live as though in it." To live as though in it.

It has been a challenging week for so many of us and for our nation. So many unknowns at this point...so many questions...so much second-guessing. A couple of

young people have contacted me with such fear for the future. And we hear the stories of increasingly violence against people who are considered "other."

We all are trying to find some hope...that perhaps a wakeup call has been needed... that certainly some change has been desired. At this point, I don't think any of us know the consequences of our election but one thing I feel stronger than ever...we ARE all in this together. Whatever your political position, we are all in this together for the ways that people are treated in our own neighborhoods and in this country.

We have this Project given to Isaiah from God as a blueprint...It longs for us to live as though in it. Fear is not going to get us there. Doubt is not called for in these times. Anger is not going to help, either.

Kathryn Matthews asks if we can strive to be people of an ethical vision grounded in scriptures like this text from Isaiah. Barbara Kingslover says, "The very least you can do in your life is figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is live inside that hope. Not admire it from a distance but live right in it, under its roof."

It may feel like Pandora's box has been opened...but as Molly reminded us at Bible Study, hope is the thing at the bottom of the box that was also let out...On all my holy mountain...there is hope.

Here's are some examples of that hope. As part of its outreach, Mohawk Trail Concerts, has begun to bring its fine music to the Franklin County Correctional Facility. I know that Mark Fraser was a little unsure what to expect when he took his cello into the jail. But listen to his report: *I played last night at the jail, wonderful. About a dozen men, from mid-twenties to perhaps forty years old. They loved the presentation, very attentive, lots of questions, it went for about 90 minutes. They were very open and interested, and emotionally mature. I felt it was the most meaningful playing I've done in a long time, in that it had the greatest impact. I think we are on to a very good thing...*

O God, on all my holy mountain...

Another example: 500 clergy from faith denominations across our country have gone to Standing Rock to express their solidarity with the Native Peoples who are seeking to protect the waters of the Missouri and sacred lands from an oil pipeline. A UCC minister from Guilford, Vermont, Rev. Lisa Sparrow, reports that some native elders said their coming was prophesied, that all seven nations would join with leaders

of all traditions at a sacred river. She said that as diverse in age, race and religion as they were, it was good, even if just a drop in the river, and it felt like a turn of a butterfly wing that could possibly affect the currents of change...

O God, on all my holy mountain...

And a third example: My niece from Seattle called me last night. She has a new job which fits her well. She finds employment for people with disabilities...She works with them, their employers and their families to ensure success. On the day after the election, she worked beside a woman at a Salvation Army; a woman whose disability prevents her from being able to speak...but she can smile.

I told my niece that what she is doing gives me hope. She laughed and said, "Cara, you have always been on my "hope list."

So, I invite us all to think about who is on our "hope list?" And perhaps more importantly, "Are WE, as individuals and as a church, on *God's* hope list?"

O God, on all my holy mountain, may we be energized more than ever, to live out of the abundance of love, compassion, forgiveness, non-violence, and truth that was exemplified for us by Jesus and that calls to us from a still-speaking God...

O God, on all my holy mountain....let us be instruments of your peace in all the places where we are...

Amen...