



ST BART'S

A Sermon by

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New Heavens and a New Earth

*Sermon preached at the nine o'clock service, November 13, 2016
The Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost—Based on Isaiah 65:17-25*

God speaks through the prophet Isaiah to God's people: I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. Be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating ..."

Isaiah lived over 2,000 years ago. He was speaking to God's people at a time when God's people were fractured from conflict within and traumatized from without—they had been sent out of their own country to live in another place, a strange land that did not feel like home.

How would it feel to be told we have to leave this country and go live in a different country, where we don't know the language or customs? Some of us here may know what that feels like.

How does it feel to be fractured from internal conflict? That one many of us likely recognize. We've lived through a lot of internal conflict these last 18 months of this election season.

Sometimes when things seem really hard and messed up, it's tempting—and it's natural—to remember times past when things were different. When life seemed better.

Remembering times past, even times before we were born, can be a good thing. History is what we call that. Learning and remembering history is a good thing. We can learn some good lessons from history: what worked, what didn't—and why. We can learn things that were good to do. We learn things we don't want to do again. We can learn how people in the past faced hard times, and how they celebrated good times.

One kind of history it's important to know is our own family history. How many of us know stories about ourselves that took place before we can actually remember them? How do we know what happened before we were born? We hear family stories and see family photos. Well, I guess that's the old fashioned way. Now many of us can watch videos of ourselves when we were toddlers, or babies, or even of us before we were born. Our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents tell stories of what life was like when they were growing up.

You heard in our opening welcome that while St. Bart's always seeks to be a family-friendly place, we've deliberately tried to make this service even more family friendly today. To prepare for this homily, I spent an hour with St. Bart's youth last Sunday, listening to their takes on this Isaiah passage. Hot tip: if the state of the world ever gets you down, ask to visit St. Bart's Youth Group or Sunday School, or attend a St. Bart's Choristers rehearsal. You will come away energized and full of hope! Last Sunday, I learned that the youths' parents play their '80's music (that's considered old music now). And when the kids play '80's music, the parents say, "Hey, you're co-opting my music!"

In one sense, the world is always changing, because we ourselves are growing and changing. Older people ask younger people to show them how to do Snapchat. Younger people ask older people for guidance in things like filling out college applications and choosing a college. Inter-generational learning is good for us all.

It's also good to learn about our country's history, St. Bart's history, and world history. Sometimes our world changes—big forces in the world affect us. Think of some of these big world changes that have affected us in the past 5, 10, 15 years: 9/11, the Great Recession, the national law legalizing same-sex marriage, millions of Syrian refugees. The current military operation in Mosul. Brexit—England will leave the European Union. Our own country's election this past week. As you know, our own parish of St. Bart's has been experiencing change, and it will continue to. Soon and very soon we will announce the election of our new rector.

Things can feel like they are changing all the time—sometimes in really good ways; sometimes it feels like things are collapsing around us. Isaiah's words remind us that God is present with us in every change. God's love and care for us NEVER change. And God is ALWAYS working amidst the change to create new heavens and a new earth.

God is always working. As God's people, I believe we're called to be working, too, as God's partners in bringing about God's new heavens and a new earth.

An example of what I mean: After this election, it's (still) clear not everyone is in agreement. Some people are happy, some are angry, some are scared. Some are protesting, which we are free to do in this country. Some are already working to find a good way forward for our country.

I have been thinking a lot since Tuesday about how I want and need to act. Maybe you have been thinking, too.

One thing I've decided: I want to stand up and work FOR the things we believe in as Christians. The equality and value and dignity of all persons. The welcome of the stranger at the gate—the oppressed, the vulnerable, the refugee, the outcast. Compassion and relief for the poor. Economic justice for those who are shut out of the human possibility of the abundant life. A commitment to non-violence, and to peace, and to putting aside our own self-interest for the sake of that peace. The gracious stewardship of creation and all that God has given into our hands. These are a quick list of reminders of what we as Christians are to work for. They were sent to our Diocese this week by our bishop, Bishop Dietsche. [<https://www.diocesenyc.org/we-pray-bishop-dietsche-writes-in-a-letter-to-the-diocese-that-god-grace-mr-trump-with-the-wisdom-and-courage-to-rise-to-the-high-calling-of-his-office-as-we-will-also-pray-that-he-be-imbu/>]

I want to stand AGAINST some of the things that have become more visible in our country in the last couple of years. I stand against Racism, the belief that a particular race is inferior and doesn't deserve equal respect. I stand against Misogyny, the belief that women are inferior and don't deserve equal respect. I stand against Bigotry, which is being intolerant of people who hold opinions different from my own. I stand against Xenophobia, the fear/dislike of people from other countries. These things have been uncovered in our county. They have become all too visible. We can no longer cover them up, or ignore them, or try to pretend they're not there.

I want to stand up for the things we believe in as Christians, as God's people, AND I want to do that in ways that respect the dignity of every human being.

That means I need to take care to express myself in ways that don't put anybody else down—especially people who voted differently from me or who think differently than I do. I don't want to put anyone down by what I say in an email (or what I would say on social media, were I on social media. Who knows, this election may be the thing that drives me over that edge.) I don't want to disrespect

anyone by yelling, by calling them names, by vandalizing someone's property, and certainly not by resorting to physical violence. I want to communicate respect ... maybe most of all by listening, by listening deeply.

This is what I'm thinking right now.

Whether we are happy about this election or whether we are not happy about this election, the wonderful truth is that we are all welcome at this table. We are all welcome at this holy table. Because each of us is God's very own beloved child.

God loves each of us through all the changes and chances of this life. And God is, even now in all the changes we are living through, STILL working to create new heavens and a new earth.

How are we—each of us individually, and we as St. Bart's community—how are we going to help bring about God's dream of peace, community harmony (community in the very widest sense), and the opportunity for abundant life for every human being?

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