

### Isaiah 65:17-25 (New Revised Standard Version)

For 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; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—and their descendants as well. Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.

### Luke 24:1-12 (New Revised Standard Version)

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

In several recent conversations and articles that I've read  
it's become clear and troubling, that as a society and culture,  
in various ways & struggles, many have not yet fully recovered,  
from often, subtle and unrecognized effects and difficulties  
**due to the Covid pandemic, isolation and our culture's response.**

Sociologists, psychologists, educators and other professionals  
are writing and talking about their observations & growing concerns  
that life in our society has certainly not yet returned to normal.

Our world, our culture and society, our institutions & communities  
have been broken, polarized, damaged and are even vicious at times  
due to a pervasive sense of loss, disappointment & hopelessness,  
**fear & dread that this may be as good as it is ever going to get.**

But that is **not** what God intends for the people he created and loves,  
**not** for us to live defeated lives of quiet desperation and fear,  
**not** to be imprisoned by the losses and defeats we've endured,  
**not** for tragic events or for past circumstances  
to control or determine or direct our future.

That's **not** how God created this world nor God's desire for us,  
as through the prophet Isaiah,  
God boldly declares and assures and promises, vs. 17, 18, 24,

For 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; for I am about to create ... Before they call, I will answer, while they  
are yet speaking, I will hear.

This part of God's message through Isaiah was addressed

to the descendants of those taken in exile to Babylon.

Most folks had tried to adapt and make the best of things,  
but it's not home and not living in the Promised Land.  
It was discouraging and nearly impossible trying  
to hold onto their identity, their dreams and hope.

**How tragic and sad, if this really is as good as it's ever going to be.**

These words, while suffering & struggling amid Babylonian captivity,  
a message to a people defeated in seemingly hopelessness and loss,  
God promises through the prophet Isaiah,  
to put their lives, like derailed trains, back on track,  
**and can you imagine hearing such wonderful words of hope & promise?**

Troubles & disaster, losses & destruction do not have the last word,  
for God promises an overwhelming love that creates anew,  
and blessings that God intends will not be held back vs. 19~23,25,

I will ... delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard, or the cry of distress. ... and my  
chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, ... for they shall be offspring blessed by the  
Lord— and their descendants as well. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox;...They  
shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.

God's intention & purpose for us is so much more and far better than  
the former or present reality under which we stagger and struggle.

God doesn't want us to live out our lives defined by the past,  
but to live by the power of God's blessings renewed in our lives,  
as the promised new creation, the coming kingdom of God  
**as God's gracious love and purpose restores our lives.**

God promises to bring us past and beyond whatever has gone before,  
to love, heal and intervene for gracious good, and make of us  
far more than just the accumulated experiences of our lives.

God promises, there are still new possibilities for newness of life.  
Our life does not have to remain the familiar it has always been,  
**and this is definitely not as good as it gets or ever will be.**

Through the life and ministry and mission of Jesus Christ,  
God demonstrated his promised kingdom, the new creation,  
by loving lost sinners, healing the blind and crippled,  
by speaking out for the powerless, feeding the hungry,  
and by welcoming and eating with the rejected outcasts.

Jesus would not be bound by the traditions of religious authorities,  
and so, he was opposed, arrested, beaten and mocked,  
scourged and crucified, then sealed dead in a tomb.

They thought that he would stay put, that now they had him  
and that at last, they had won and he had finally lost.  
They thought now they could maintain status quo & rituals,  
with everyone set, frozen in place, set by circumstances.

Even his friends and disciples were trapped in that expectation,  
for they knew what happened when someone was crucified,  
and Easter morning came at the end of a horrible few days.

The women that Easter morning, were going out to care for the dead.  
What would anyone expect to find in a graveyard?  
Obviously, corpses and death, at least most of the time,  
**but then God reversed their human expectations.**

When they arrived, the tomb was empty,  
and while the women stood before the open tomb, confused,  
then suddenly there were two messengers from God, vs. 5-8,

The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living

among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember what he told you, ... then they remembered his words...

There are three critical declarations, elements of this passage:

- 1 - discovery of the empty tomb
- 2 - word from the two angelic messengers
- 3 - they remembered the words, the promises of Jesus

**Since Jesus did die, was buried and then he arose as promised,  
then surely there's nothing too difficult or impossible with God.**

The resurrection of Jesus reversed all human expectations,  
and demonstrates God's transforming power—  
the new creation – the coming kingdom of God.

Easter means that the supposed end and last word, are not final,  
and that things are not necessarily as limited as they appear,

because there's more mercy in God **than** there is sin in the world,  
that forgiveness & mercy are stronger **than** any evil or sin,  
and that love is much stronger **than** suffering and death.

In raising Jesus from the dead,  
God vindicated and validated all that Jesus had spoken & taught,  
about loving our enemies, forgiving others 70 times 70,  
having compassion for the poor & needy, feeding the hungry,  
and loving God even more than wanting material things.

Easter resurrection means that God's promise and presence  
changes and redefines how we can choose to live out our lives,  
how we can deal with our losses, wounds and hard times,  
and even face the powers of death that confront us.

I believe passionately in the full bodily resurrection of Christ,  
not just as a Bible story or memory, **but as a living presence** –  
because in my own life, I have experienced the risen Lord.  
**That truth and experience of God's grace are what keeps me going.**

I know that God can and does make good of whatever came before  
and that God's Holy Spirit present and powerful in our lives  
can most assuredly turn any darkness into healing light,  
and that God who resurrected Jesus, can also resurrects us.

So, Jesus touches our lives with his gracious presence as love  
empowering us to let go of our damaged, wounded & broken past,  
freeing us to live a future that is filled with promise & purpose,  
as we're called to touch our neighbors with God's healing grace.

That means, that the primary task of the church, as the people of God,  
is, that as those who have been touched by God's love in Christ,  
we are to touch one another, reaching out to our world of neighbors,  
and spread the good news of God's liberating love, grace and hope.

Easter is the ultimate proof of God's power and love, because God  
can transform even our deepest dark & most hopeless into victory.

That becomes our hope, the promised new creation, the kingdom of God,  
where there is change & release from all that restrains joy & hope,  
promising rescue from whatever corrupts and locks us in place,  
freeing us to live a life that's filled with promise, joy & hope.

Our God is glorious, good and awesome in his rescue and healing,  
who can and will use our circumstances, the very problems we face  
**to transform us, to bless us and to enlarge our faith,  
because Jesus Christ is alive, and with us every day.**

It is our faith, **our trust and hope in the resurrection** – eternal life  
that enables us to see beyond this life's tribulations and hurts,  
beyond life's disappointments and losses, **and to perceive**

**that God is at work on our behalf to build us up and bless.**

For the Christian, of course we care deeply, and we're attentive

to the events, situations and conditions of life in this world,

**but our perspective is also guided by what's up ahead,**

**that most defines every aspect of the Christian life.**

**The critical question is, where we decide to place our trust.**

This day, let Christ' resurrection be your true and present hope,  
a ray of light into even our worst problem and darkest struggle,  
none of which is ever as large or powerful as God's love for us.

Today hear God's message of hope and promise,  
that he is risen, that Jesus is alive,  
and because he lives, so too, we shall live.

That means being able to trust that God's wisdom is greater than ours,  
**knowing that I can be blessed even in my weakness, losses & failings**  
**for such is the mercy & wisdom – indeed the wonder of God's grace,**  
**which gives us courage to face all things in life or in death.**

Perhaps you've heard this story before, it was back in the 1960's,  
amid the turmoil of Viet Nam War protests, drugs, racial unrest,  
political strife, assassinations and riots in the street,  
that a young married couple, Christian musicians were troubled  
and concerned about bringing a child into such a broken world.

During a time of prayer at a Bible study with friends,  
they felt the Presence of God and the hope of resurrection,  
that their lives were entirely in God's hands,  
and so, the future was nothing to fear or dread.

When their son was born, they wrote a familiar piece of music,  
**Because He lives, I can face tomorrow, because He lives all fear is gone,**  
**because I know He holds the future,**  
**and life is worth the living because he lives.**

Challenged beyond our own strength and wisdom to do for ourselves,  
we can experience God's promises and faithfulness fulfilled,  
the abiding power, grace & assurance that come from God alone,  
that are always present & powerful, hope to those in need,  
and visible through the eyes of faith to those who trust...

... exactly as Paul explains it, 2 Corinthians 4:16-17

So, we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure.