

November 17, 2019
Saints Triumphant
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Welcome Home: To an Everlasting Family

Isaiah 65:17-25 (NIV)

“See, 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; the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child; the one who fails to reach 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 work of their hands. 23 They will not labor in vain, nor will they 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, and dust will be the serpent’s food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,” says the Lord.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Have you had those times in your life when you thought, “Life is good!”? When those times happen, we want them to continue. Maybe it was when you were growing up without a care in the world. Life was good when I was young and could run down the hill to the little creek to play or spend a winter afternoon sledding down that same hill. Life was good at my grandparents’ house on the lake or at my other grandparents’ farm pond.

Or maybe we remember when life was good as the sound of laughter filled the house from little ones. There is nothing quite like the joyful laughter of a toddler. Or maybe you think life is good when your work is going well. You find satisfaction in accomplishing what you set out to accomplish. I wish these days could continue.

Maybe life is good when the family all gathers together for a reunion. I really enjoyed our church family reunion last month as we kicked off this Welcome Home series. Whether at church or in your own family, it is wonderful when we gather with loved ones for fun and stories and, of course, lots of food. If only these days could last forever.

Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord tells us that there will be a time when we can say “Life is good” every day. For he has welcomed us into an everlasting family.

See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.

The Jews of Isaiah’s time had seen some terrible days. The enemy Assyrians had destroyed many towns in Judah. They had surrounded Jerusalem and it looked like Jerusalem would also fall. But the Lord rescued his people when Isaiah and King Hezekiah turned to the Lord for help. The Lord killed many of the enemy and the rest fled back to Assyria. Life was good because they had been rescued but think of

all the former things, the bad times that would still be in their minds. And then Isaiah prophecies about the future of the people of Judah. He tells them that they will be taken into exile and eventually return to Jerusalem. Life would be good when they returned but there were many difficult years in their future.

But here, at the end of Isaiah's prophecy the Lord reveals a time when the future will not be a concern and the past troubles will not be remembered. For the Lord will create a new heavens and a new earth.

The word "create" takes us back to Genesis when God created the heavens and the earth in the beginning. Everything was perfect in the beginning. And Isaiah tells us that everything will be perfect again because God is making everything new again. This is the same image of heaven that John sees in the reading from Revelation today. Heaven is a restored Eden. Life will be good!

Remembering the past can sometimes ruin the best days of life on this earth. But in heaven the former things will not be remembered or come to mind. None of the memories of the past will weigh down our hearts. Our past sins and rebellious ways may dampen our joy in life now, but they will not be remembered by us or by the Lord in heaven. For Christ has removed our sins from us as far as the east is from the west. He remembers our wickedness and sin no more and neither will we in heaven.

Our hearts may be scarred by what others have done to us in this world. It is hard to forget the pain and betrayal of friends and family now. But these pains will be the former things that are not remembered in heaven.

Our hearts may grieve for those loved ones whom the Lord has taken from this world and brought into the everlasting family of the saints triumphant in heaven. We miss them. Certain events and songs and places that we shared with these loved ones are now the reason for tears to flow. But not in heaven. For when we join with all believers as the saints triumphant, it will be all joy and the Lord tells us... *the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.*

Therefore, the Lord says to "*be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.*" Of course we will rejoice. Through Christ, we have been forgiven of every sin and we have a place reserved in God's everlasting family where we will dwell in the new heavens and new earth forever. We rejoice and thank the Lord. But we are not the only ones to rejoice. Listen to what the Lord says about his family.

I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people

I know why we rejoice but why would God rejoice in me? I'm lazy and sinful. My mind and heart are not pure. My actions do not match up with God's commands. I have not loved my neighbor or my family as I should. I have not loved the Lord with all my mind and heart and strength. I must be a big disappointment to God. But he rejoices in you!

God rejoices in you because he purchased you with the blood of his Son, Jesus Christ. He rejoices in you because he washed your sins away in the waters of Baptism. He rejoices in you because, in Christ, you are a new creation. And the Lord will rejoice in heaven when all his people, the saints, the believers are gathered before him. It brings our God great joy to bring joy to his people.

It is just over five weeks until Christmas. Who gets more joy when opening gifts at Christmas, the person receiving the gift or the person giving the gift? Isn't it fun to see the reaction of a little one when they open a present? When we see their joy we have to rejoice too. Our loving God has paid more for the gift

of our eternal life than we could ever pay for a gift. He gave the life of his Son. We might plan a gift for a month or even a year but he has planned out our salvation from before time began. Right now, we only see a peek inside the wrapping paper on what heaven will be like. But God knows his heaven is much more than we can imagine. How he will rejoice when we become one of the saints triumphant as we rejoice in all his gifts!

During Holy Week, just days before Jesus would offer his life on the cross to pay for the sins of all people, Jesus looked over Jerusalem and said this: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing” (Matthew 23:37). Jesus has a great desire to gather all people into his family through faith in him. But some would not believe. Some continued to reject him and you can hear the pain in his voice as he weeps over Jerusalem. It brings Christ no joy to see people reject him and refuse his gifts. It brings God no joy for sinners to remain outside of his family. But it brings him and the angels of heaven great joy when one sinner repents, when one more person joins the family of God through faith in Christ. And God will rejoice over his people in the new heavens and new earth.

But wait! That’s not all. There are so many blessings God gives to his everlasting family. Some we enjoy now and some in heaven. As part of his family, we will not have to worry about the length of our life here for when it ends we will join the saints triumphant and then life will never end. Isaiah say it this way:

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; the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child; the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed.

We do not have to worry about our daily necessities here for the Lord will provide what we and our children need for this life. And when this life ends, we will never lack anything again. As Isaiah says:

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 work of their hands. 23 They will not labor in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the Lord, they and their descendants with them.

As part of God’s everlasting family, he hears our prayers. In fact, he knows what we need before we pray. He is working out all things for our eternal good. *Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.*

And finally, Isaiah gives us the beautiful picture of peace that we will enjoy in heaven with our everlasting family. We will not have to worry about predators and enemies. We will not have to worry about that ancient serpent, the devil for he will be judged and sentenced to hell. We will be in the presence of the Lamb of God who was slain but is now alive forever and ever. And he will give all of his family perfect peace forever. *The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent’s food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,” says the Lord.*

Amen.