

November 14, 2010

The Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Isaiah 65.17-25

All Saints' Episcopal Church, Atlanta, Georgia

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It seems like there aren't many mysteries left.

We can be a jaded and mystery-free society. Science and technology use their considerable power to unlock the universe's secrets. They make creation more and more available to us laity.

We know what planets light years away are made of. We can fit encyclopedias worth of information on micro chips the size of a dime. Even *Star Wars*, whose effects were once not so long ago so dramatic and amazing, seems dated and old fashioned compared to what studios can do with computers these days.

Little shocks or amazes us. There's nothing we haven't seen. There's not much we can't create or dream up. New is not terribly interesting. Often, new isn't even news.

So when we hear from Isaiah this morning that God is doing a new thing, it doesn't really move us all that much. What new thing? I think Steve Jobs did a new thing last week. Is it going to top that?

In fact, sometimes I'd argue that we're hell bent on tearing down and deconstructing than being impressed by any new thing. Our vehicles are bigger and more environmentally dangerous, our political rhetoric is more hateful, our landfills are more and more full of last year's excitement while we, filled with ennui, wait for the next thing that may or may not satisfy us. The hurtful and hateful is much more exciting.

Our reading from Isaiah is situated in a time when all should have been well. The Jewish people were back in their promised land after a long and bitter exile in Babylon. But all is not well. They are in conflict with those who had stayed behind. No one can agree on a common form of government, their property has been claimed by others. The situation made bleak by exile has been made bleaker when the goodness they expected was no longer present in their land of milk and honey.

And so the prophet Isaiah is reminding them that God is always up to something and now is no exception. "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... no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress."

The people needed a word of good news, and a new thing would have been not only welcome but deeply necessary. The response, I imagine, would have been relief and hope, perhaps awe at God's ability to work in the world, to create something new and wonderful from something so depressing and difficult.

What is happening to us that we, too, in our own troubled time, cannot look toward this new heaven and earth that God is creating in our world with a sense of wonder and welcome? When we refuse to be inspired by anything other than the next big thing, we forget to be inspired by the miracles that continue to happen all around us.

Let me be clear, I have no problem with science and technology. Great things have come from it, medical advances, quality of life improvements and everything Apple has ever made, for example. And I certainly join the modern world's quest to better understand the way things tick, to deepen our knowledge of creation.

But sometimes I worry that we are losing the ability to be inspired or even awed into remembering that we are not the ultimate Creator, God is. We can deal in microchips and microscopes but God is the one who ultimately makes the flowers open, who sets the heart to beating, who vibrates the violin's strings, who spins the earth for yet another gifted day.

This is not to say that we need to sit back and wait for God to get things done, or that we should wait like circus-goers, ready to be entertained by God's show. We are not the primary creators in the world, God is, but we have to be active participants.

God provides the will and the way for the world to be created anew and it is up to us to listen and act, to not let our jadedness get in the way of our ability to be amazed and be participants in creation in order for the new thing to take hold, to catch on and to spread like wildfire in a world drowning in its own sadness

And I know we can do it because I see God creating new heaven and earth with and through us all the time. I hope you see and are inspired too.

Those of us who spend too much time on the "interwebs" have recently seen a lot of buzz recently about the *It Gets Better Project*.

The It Gets Better Project is a series of thousands of videos submitted by adults all over the world encouraging bullied teenagers to persevere through the difficult teen years. In reaction to the recent deaths by suicide of seven gay teenagers who couldn't stand the bullying they received in high school, this website has become a resource for any teenager or young adult who feels desperately alone in her differentness.

There are videos posted by single people and families, all races and ages and creeds. Gene Robinson has posted a video, and Hilary Clinton, Laura Bush, Barack Obama and Katharine Jefferts Schiori and most of Broadway.

It gets better, they say, you will fall in love with someone who loves you back. It gets better, you will find an accepting community. It gets better, you are beautiful just the way you are. It gets better, God loves you.

For many kids, I suspect, this will be the only place they get these messages, from the connective power of the internet. This is God creating a new thing. This project is just one of the ways that God is introducing the world to a future where kids will grow up knowing that they are beloved because they are surrounded, every last one of them, by communities that refuse to let them forget it.

Do you see this new thing? Can you see how God is creating? Better yet, can you see how God is creating with our participation?

Do you see the miracle happening before you when that flower opens, that string sings, when that heart beats? Can you then allow yourself to be moved when communities are created, when children are pronounced sacred?

The prophet Isaiah was talking about a huge movement by God, a vision of a new heaven here on earth. Isaiah was exhorting the people to hope in a future brighter than anything they could imagine, and certainly brighter than that in which they were stuck.

But we have to believe it. We have to hope and then use that hope to act.

Do you see the new heavens and new earth yet?

Like the It Gets Better Project, we can be viral with our willingness to create love that is deeper, stronger and far more powerful than the shallow hate that dominates our streets, our airways and, sometimes our hearts.

We can be viral with a corporate imagination that sees a world better, equal, forgiving, nurturing, and then the will to work with God to make it happen.

God is creating a new heavens and a new earth. Be glad and rejoice in what God is creating.