

Sermon: 2019/12/15 (3rd Sunday of Advent, Year A) - Isaiah 35:1-10; Psalm 146:4-9; James 5:7-10; &, Matthew 11:2-11_BTR

[Invite children to the front. Etch-a-Sketch: pre-draw a desert scene w/ cacti, dry bones, etc.]

[Pretend to use the etch-a-sketch.]

Have you ever sat in a waiting-room?
Yes?
Where?

[To see an optician, at the airport, etc.]

And how was it?

[Boring.]

It can be boring, can't it?
Although I think that we often don't make as much of that time as we could.
Usually, there are people all around us waiting too,
and I bet some of them have fascinating life-stories - if only we asked.
Usually, there is a box of toys as well.
And magazines.
And natural beauty to admire through the window.
Or at least people to observe - their funny ways.

But the point of a waiting-room is that it is necessary to achieve some other better thing: like getting medicine from a doctor, or relief from having a rancid tooth pulled by the dentist.

Well, Jesus' brother James suggests to us (this morning in his letter) that (this) life is a bit like a waiting-room.

Which means that we will need to be patient.
For what comes after the waiting is over is *wonderful*:
the prophet Isiah describes it for us:
God will *re*-create the *whole* universe,
and it is going to be *much* better than it is now.

[Show etch-a-sketch.]

Now, it has dry deserts, and places of danger and loneliness - like where predatory jackals and coyotes lurk.

[Shake etch-a-sketch.]

But *then*, it will be fertile, lush and green *everywhere*!

[Draw flowers, flowing river, etc.]

And it will be a place of "abundance" and safety.

Doesn't that sound great?

Let's pray:
Lord God, ...

[Dismiss children.]

We have something especially to celebrate this morning, so I'll keep my remarks on today's passages brief:

Isaiah offers us this *incredible* image of a *beautiful, alternative* existence: it is, to put it simply, *perfection* itself.

Comparable to the legendary Garden of Eden.

(Though, by an honest appraisal of *all* the (relevant) Scriptural "data," even *that* is transcended.)

I called it last week, 'God's "endgame."'

And it is not only that thing that *Christians* have *longed* for for two-thousand years, it is the very same "prize" that the *Jewish* people were waiting for for *many* centuries before that. Indeed, it seems to me that human beings have *always* hoped for it - we "catch" crude, misshapen, modest glimpses of what the prophet called 'new heavens and the new earth' in many of the ancient *pagan* mythologies, for instance.

We share with them, then, a "niggle;" an "itch," if you like, that something about the world, despite its many, *many* glories - whether the intricate complexity of the human-cell, the colors of the butterfly, or the vast size of the galaxies - is not right.

Is...broken.

We see that for *far* too many people, life is 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short!'

Needlessly so.

That there is an excess of cruelty.

That there is an excess of stupidity.

That there is an excess of thoughtlessness.

The singer Alanis Morissette - who once played God *herself*, in a movie - articulated many of life's frustrations in her early-nineties hit-single, *Ironic*.^[n.1]

She sings, for example, about a man who finally wins the lottery, 'but died the next day; ...[a] black-fly in your Chardonnay, ...a death-row pardon, two minutes too late...a free-ride when you've already paid... and who would have thought: "it figures."'

"It figures."

In other words, these things that go wrong in our lives and homes and communities do so not *in spite* of what is (currently) true and real *but because* of existing arrangements.

They are genuinely and thoroughly...*symptomatic*.

At the centre of What-Is-To-Come, however, *Isaiah* sees something else *entirely* - something *fundamentally* to the contrary:

He describes its defining characteristics in these terms: 'the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.'

And he and all his contemporaries - all the people of the Old Covenant, really - thought that this transformation would happen *at once* - in its entirety - with the coming of the Messiah. But they had, unintentionally, conflated what we now see is a staggered, *two*-chapter

implementation of the "endgame:"

Jesus came, but not everything changed rightaway.

Thus, He had to *prove* Himself - such as, we see, to John the Baptist - by offering a foretaste of Isaiah's vision: like a try-before-you-buy - so He tells His wildman-cousin, *look*, watch me - see the miracles I perform; these are the *very* things that long-ago were seen.

Banish your doubts.

Quit your half-heartedness:

the End *is* near - and it has been for a while.

Footnotes:

1. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jne9t8sHpUc>