

Title: "The Future Dimension of 3D Faith"

Text: Isaiah 65:17-25; Revelation 21:1-5

We are continuing to explore the multiple dimensions of our faith lives,

-seeking to grasp how wide and long and high and deep the love of Christ is for us.

Today I'd like to focus our sights on the "future" dimension of our faith.

-Time is a fourth dimension in this world that God created, and our faith encompasses the past, the present, and the future.

-Time is also in God's hands.

And when it comes to this season of Advent, it is a time of looking forward in hope.

-The word "advent" means "coming" or "arrival."

-And in Advent we are looking forward to the coming of the Christ.

Not only the first coming of the Christ,

-when He came as a baby in Bethlehem at Christmas;

-but in Advent we also look forward in hope to Christ's second coming,

-when He will come in glory and bring God's whole plan of redemption to fulfillment.

Earlier in the service we read Isaiah's prophecy of what that full redemption would be like: a new heavens and a new earth where the wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like an ox.

Listen now to the Revelation given to the Apostle John, and his description at the very end of the Bible.

Do you see how both descriptions of the future fulfillment of God's redemption speak of a new heaven and a new earth?

-Isaiah describes it in the Old Testament, and John describes it in the New Testament.

And you might think that IF there is ultimately going to be a new heavens and a new earth,
-then the old heavens and earth are going to be thrown away and discarded as refuse.

In our minds, and in our disposable society, if something isn't working right with your old car, your old computer, your old TV set, your old microwave,
-well, throw it out and get a new one.

So we might think that since this world is broken by sin,
-then God's plan will be to get rid of it and create a new heavens and a new earth.

And there is language all through the Book of Revelation, and here in verse 1,
-which says that the first heaven and the first earth will "pass away."

But we need to be careful about assuming that "pass away" means "destroyed" or "thrown away."

And here's why?

1. First: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

-Those are the very first words of the Bible in Genesis 1:1.

And the heavens and the earth that God created were not only good, but God pronounced them very good.

The heavens that we know as "our universe" and the earth that we know as "our world,"

-are an amazing and beautiful creation.

-And Psalm 19 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God!"

-And Psalm 24 proclaims, "The earth is the LORD's and everything in it!"

So the heavens and the earth were created by God and belong to God and display the glory of God.

-The creation is not portrayed in the Bible as a broken thing that needs to be thrown out.

No. What the Bible says is, that sin entered into the world and brought brokenness, evil, and death into the creation.

-It is sin that separated us from God.

-It is sin that has caused all of creation to groan and suffer.

-It is sin that has caused the wolf to eat the lamb and the lion to slaughter the ox.

-It is sin that has caused us to be broken in our relationship with God, and within ourselves, and with each other, and with the creation around us.

So the Bible says it is not the heavens and the earth that need to be destroyed,

-it is sin that needs to be destroyed.

-It is sin that needs to be wiped out.

But the creation? What it needs is to be redeemed, restored, refreshed, renewed.

-And the whole story of the Bible is how God has set about to destroy the sin, and redeem His creation.

And that story culminates in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

-And here's the promise for the future: the Bible says that Jesus' death and resurrection is the first fruits of what is to come.

"First fruits" means that what God did for Jesus in his death and resurrection is what is promised for us and for all of God's creation.

God didn't destroy Jesus' body in order to rid the world of sin.

-No. His body truly died, but then God resurrected it.

-He raised it to newness of life. But it was still Jesus' body.

Do you see? It is the sin that was put to death on the cross.

-But having died to sin once and for all, Jesus was raised bodily from the dead to live forever.

That is the model of what God's redemption looks like.

-He doesn't want to destroy the creation, or destroy you and me.

-He wants to redeem us all, and raise us all to newness of life.

And so when you and I come to saving faith in Christ,
-and our sin is cleansed by the atoning blood of Christ,
-the Bible says we become a “new creation.”

But being “new” doesn’t mean that our old creation is
destroyed.

-You are still you, and I am still me.

-We aren’t thrown out and re-created to become a new
creation.

-No, it’s simply that the sin is removed, and so we become
like new.

-We become “redeemed.”

-We are restored to the way God created us to be.

The Bible says we are now members of a royal priesthood, a
holy nation.

-We are now a people belonging to God.

-We are called sons and daughters of the living God,

-members of His family,

-citizens of His Kingdom.

All of that was not true of us before, but in Christ it is true of us
now.

-Because we have been made new, you see?

And when Christ comes again in glory, we will experience the
fullness of our redemption.

-All the earth will experience the fullness of that redemption.

-All the heavens will experience the fullness of that
redemption.

-Isaiah says the wolf will lie down with the lamb, and not eat
the lamb.

-The lion won’t tear apart its prey anymore, but will eat grass
and hay like an ox.

-We will all be vegetarians, for we will not harm or destroy
other creatures or the creation anymore.

That is our future hope.

-And so what does that mean for us now?

1. Well first, it means that salvation in the Bible is not just
about you and me going to heaven when we die.

Salvation is a way bigger concept than that in the Bible.
-It is about God redeeming all of creation.
-And your salvation and my salvation are a part of that much bigger story of salvation.

And so your salvation and my salvation are about being raised to life like Jesus was,
-and discovering new life in God's new heaven and new earth.

And that salvation isn't just confined to human beings, but affects all of creation.
-God is in the business of redeeming and renewing the heavens and the earth.

Our personal salvation is a witness and a sign of what God wants to do for the whole creation.
-And our lives as we live them now are an opportunity for us to participate in God's great redemption.

We get to join God in his Kingdom right now in Christ.
-We get to begin living as citizens of the Kingdom right now.
-We get to start acting in ways right now that are more in tune with the values of God's coming Kingdom
-than with the values of this present broken world.

- a. So in the upward dimension of our lives:
 - We treat God Himself as our King.
 - And we live right now in this world in humble submission to him as his servants.

- b. In the inward dimension of our lives:
 - We treat ourselves as sons and daughters of God,
 - new creations in Christ, whose sins have been atoned for.
 - And we care for our souls as such.
 - We cooperate with the Holy Spirit's work in our lives.
 - We open ourselves up to God and invite Him in.

- c. And in the outward dimension of our lives:
 - We treat other people around us the way Jesus would treat them.

- We no longer judge them by their gender, the color of their skin, their ethnicity or nationality, or religion.
- Because we know that in the coming Kingdom of God, there will be people gathered around God's throne from every nation, every tribe, every people group, every language,
 - so we begin to see people now as potential candidates for the Kingdom.
- And we treat them with the respect and compassion and generosity and kindness that a citizen of God's Kingdom would be afforded.

-And here's the other thing: in the outward dimension of our lives, we also get to treat the heavens and the earth around us in light of its coming redemption.

We get to live our lives now caring for the environment

- because God cares for it, and it displays His glory, and His plan is to redeem all of creation and make it new.

So you and I ought to be good stewards of the heavens and the earth.

- This too is part of the outward dimension of our faith lives.
- In the beginning at creation, in Genesis 1 and 2, human beings were created to be stewards and caretakers of the earth.
- We were to work the ground and take care of it.
- It was the job God gave us to do.

Now when Adam and Eve fell into sin, part of the curse on Adam was that working the ground would become a burden and not a blessing.

- The ground would produce thorns and weeds, and it would be toil to cultivate the land,
 - Adam would work by the sweat of his brow.
 - Just like Eve would now produce children through pain in childbirth.

That which was formerly a blessing would now be complicated and burdensome because of sin.

But we were still called to be stewards and caretakers of the earth, for it is God's creation, and it is good.
And work is good.

But you and I, as partakers in God's redemption, we get to live now and work now in ways that reveal God's redemption.

We get to treat the earth, and the environment,
-the seas and the lakes and the rivers,
-the mountains and the valleys,
-the air that we breathe, the ozone layer above,
-we get to treat it all as good stewards of God's good creation.

There are those who think that the heavens and the earth are all destined to be destroyed, so who cares what we do to them now.

-I say that is horrible theology.
-It's not true to the Bible, and it is not true to God's great plan of redemption.

No. God's plan is to ultimately redeem and restore and renew his creation.

-Just like he raised Jesus from the dead,
-and just like he has made a new creation of you and me,
he is going to make a new heavens and a new earth.

-You and I get to participate with Him in his redeeming work
-by treating God right now as our King
-by treating ourselves as His redeemed sons and daughters
-by treating other people as potential candidates for God's Kingdom no matter who they are,
-and by treating the heavens and the earth as God's good creation which displays God's glory.

In this season of Advent, as we look forward in hope to the redemption of all creation,

-let's live in ways that honor and embody that hope.

Let us pray.