

The Possible Dream
November 17, 2019
Isaiah 65:17-25

Anyone who knows me knows I can best be described in one word: a nerd. Katie might argue that “dork” might be a better word for me, but that’s another topic for another time. Regardless, I love Disney princess movies, especially when the characters are able to be related to. This is probably the truest for Princess Tiana in “The Princess and the Frog,” a princess who was born dirt poor but with dreams. In fact, at the start of the movie, we see a six-year-old Tiana wishing on a star for her father and her to be able to start up a restaurant, all because her friend told her that “If you make a wish on the evening star, it’s sure to come true.” We can all relate to the character of Tiana, because we all have wishes and dreams. We wish for winning lottery tickets, cures to various ailments, and for people to use their turn signals while driving. We dream of a world where it’s safe for our children to walk to and from school again, to play in the streets and to not have to practice “active shooter” routines during the course of the year. As we spoke about last week, we hope for better things to come, for every hard “good-bye” to only ever be a “see you later.” Sure enough, the Bible reading today describes such a world, with many images to only further what we hope is a mutual dream.

The first image in the reading is that of an absence of “weeping” or “cries of distress” in this new world. If one is weeping or “crying out in distress,” this is because one feels pain, whether physically or emotionally. Usually, we attribute “weeping” specifically with the greatest of pains, death being a prime example of such a pain. Well, this world that is described has no weeping, nothing that would cause such emotional or physical distress. It is a world free of death, free of guilt or shame, free of pain, period. Already this world sounds wonderful. However, this is not the only image we are given.

The next image we see is that of age: infants who live more than just a couple days. There’s no Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, no still births or miscarriages, no infant mortality whatsoever. On the other end of the spectrum, we all have lifetimes that last extraordinarily long. For this to be a possibility, this would indicate that there would be no diseases, medical conditions, no need for hospital stays, pricey medications, or insurances. There would be no need for worrying about whether or not you have all the parts for your Medicare program at the best rates possible and whether or not all your needs are being met. It’s sounding even better now, right? But wait, there’s more!

Another image presented would be reaping that which one sows: living in the houses one builds and eating of the harvest one plants. No one gets credit for the work of others. Everyone is well-fed, clothed, and has a roof over their head. With that roof comes water, electricity, and all the amenities therein. For this to be a possibility, though, there would need to be an absence of such hindrances as racism, socio-economic inequality, sexism, ageism, or any other form of discrimination and “us v. them” mentality. In short, this designates a world without unemployment, poverty, famine, or any of the mental illnesses that might result from those things. This is a world where everyone’s needs are met in surplus.

A fourth image is the relationship between God and humans. “Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.” We have here an image of God being acutely attuned to our needs, our hearts, and our thoughts. For this to be a possibility, all humanity would have to be reconciled to God, meaning a world without Sin, a world where righteousness prevails and where “the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.” What was, what is, those will be erased memories in this new world.

Lastly, we have the image of natural enemies eating together. “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox.” While an interesting scene to imagine (a wolf grazing in a pasture next to a lamb or a lion shoving his face into a bale of hay like Katie’s and my pets shove their faces into their bowls (and sometimes each other’s bowls) throughout the day), this image goes deeper than just face value. Often, Israel’s enemies as well as corrupt Israelite leaders were compared with lions and wolves, predatory beasts that cause harm and “devour” the people of Israel, the “flock” of God. So, in this image then, the corrupt leaders are not leading people astray, nor are our enemies trying to cause us harm. Rather, all are living in harmony, living side-by-side and at peace with one another. So, we have here an image of a world without conflict, strife, bloodshed, war, or the like. We have an image of a world that is truly at peace.

This world that this passage draws to mind, it truly is a dream come true, a hope fulfilled, a wish granted, wouldn’t you all agree? You want to know something even more incredible? This world that’s described in this passage is not just some impossible dream. This is a world promised by God to those just returned from exile. This world is God’s vision for our world; a vision of Heaven on Earth, of God’s kingdom finally realized. However, this is not just going to be a “wish granted” as we all hope. Quickly turning back to “The Princess and the Frog” for a moment, Tiana’s father, hearing his six-or-so-year-old daughter wishing on stars, makes a profound and important point: “You wish and you dream with all of your heart, but you remember that old star can only take you part of the way. You got to help it along with some hard work of your own, and then, you can do anything you set your mind to.”

We are the hands, the feet, and the voice of God in this world. God can and will use every one of us every day of our lives to bring this world closer to this full realization of God’s kingdom. As you go forth today I invite you to ask yourself two things: First, how is God using you to make this “Heaven on Earth” a reality? Second, what can we as a congregation do to work towards that same goal?