

“A New Day Dawning”

**Pastor Dave Carlson
First Presbyterian Church
November 20, 2016**

Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 65:17-25

New Testament Lesson: Matthew 13:34, 35, 44-46

David Argo is a Methodist pastor who spent his teenage years – like many people – in a rough relationship with his mother. The two of them never saw eye-to-eye.

Then when he was a young adult, they battled over their different views of the world. As they both grew older, they never really felt a sense of peace in their relationship.

Then in her latter years, David’s mother suffered a stroke. The doctor said she might not live, so David traveled across several states to be with her. He sat by her bed, not knowing if she was aware of his presence. For several days, he talked to her, sang hymns to her, and read the Bible to her. The hospice staff was amazed that she was continuing to live. Finally one of them said, “We think she just enjoys having you here.”

And with that, David realized he had not been in the same room with her for an entire day since he was an infant. Somewhere in the course of those nights and days, he realized that “the wolf and the lamb were feeding together.”¹ What brought David and his mother together - a vision of what could be, or grief over what never was? What brings a people of faith together?

In our Old Testament reading for today, the people of ancient Israel were held together by their grief over what never was. They returned to their homeland from exile – from being held captive in Babylon – and found their land uprooted, other people living in their homes, and a foreign power in charge of their country.

And in the midst of their grief, comes the prophet Isaiah. He has a vision. A vision of what can be – what will be, according to God’s word. “I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall there be ... an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime. ... They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit....”

And yet, the Israelites lived and died with other people inhabiting in their homes, other people eating the fruit of their land. Eventually, their nation faded away as the Jewish faithful dispersed throughout the land. And still, they maintained their

¹ Argo, David. “The kingdom in a hospice room.” *Walking in the Word: UM Connection*, November 7, 2001. Bwconf.org.

faith in the promises of God – long life, a homeland of their own, and food enough for everyone.

Fast forward to today. God's promises of peace and harmony is here for us, for the taking, if we would only live into that promise, and all that comes with it. We can all give thanks this day for long life, a country we call home and food aplenty. And still, God promises more. God promises that the separation between God and humanity will be no more, and with that, the separation between people of different opinions and races and economic means will be no more.

We see this about God and humanity where Isaiah says, "Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear." This is different from how things were in the Garden of Eden when God called out to us and we hid ourselves, because we had disobeyed God. Now, before we even call out to God, God hears us, and for this, we give thanks.

And still, God promises more. God promises to tear down the divisions that separate us one from another. Isaiah foretells of a time when "the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox..." Isaiah foretells of a time when we will live in peace with one another despite our differences.

This vision of heaven on earth may seem far off, but that's no reason stop to believing. Just consider the faith of the missionary who was wandering through the African wilderness when he encountered a lion. There was nowhere to run so the man fell to his knees and said, "Lord, please make this lion a Christian!" Surprisingly the lion also fell to a crouch and bowed his head, saying, "Lord, I give you thanks for this bounty I am about to receive."

The point is our world is a long way from the perfect world God envisions, peace and harmony among all creatures. Looking at this world, we have more than our share of problems. And yet, looking at God's promises, there is a new day dawning. Living in this world, there is pain and suffering. But living into God's promises, there is a new day dawning. Standing in faith, we see the future as God intends it, we experience the blessings of God all around us.

Toward the end of the service today, we will bring our pledge cards to the Lord's Table. This is us standing in faith, certain of the future God intends. This is us standing in faith, sharing in the blessings of God all around us.

People who would otherwise not have a roof over their heads will have it because of this day at First Presbyterian Church. People who might not otherwise have enough to eat, will feast with us at Table today because of First Presbyterian Church. This is God's vision. This is our joy.

And looking further into the future, looking to tomorrow and the next day and the next day, we can see people of different beliefs and practices living together in peace, even as we seek to create such peace in our own lives. In fact, embracing such a peace and abundance in our own lives is the only way we will see God's vision of heaven on earth come true.

We are blessed to glimpse God's vision of the future, through the words of Isaiah, through the ministry of this church, through the grace and mercy of the Lord in our hearts.

Yes, we have a long way to go. Yes, it seems hardly possible that all the world can get there. But without the vision without faith, what do we have?

Jesus tells us that with his coming the kingdom of God is already begun. And for those who follow him, that kingdom comes ever closer to reality through what we say and do, here and now.

So let us be thankful for the role we are blessed to have in God's Kingdom of peace and harmony. Let us share that blessing with one another this day, and in all our days to come. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

God, whose love endures forever, whose faithfulness is to all generations, we turn to you as your grateful people.

We give thanks for the gifts of this past year, for all that has given us life, for all that has brought joy, for all sources of comfort, healing and peace ...

We remember those who have shown us your love, whose faces reflect your image, whose actions have given us a glimpse of your work among us.

We lift up those who have shown forgiveness, whose words have encouraged, whose strength has made us stronger, whose service has inspired us to serve others.

We give thanks for all of the ways your divine hand moves among us, ruling over rulers, bringing peace, and restoring creation.

Gracious God, we know that your gifts are not yet complete, that many of us still feel your steadfast love is distant.

Grant us the wisdom to know that our best appreciation for your gifts comes in sharing them with others, that your love is to be acted out, your justice is meant to be lived.

As we grow in our thanksgiving, may we come to live the prayer that was taught to us by the Lord, saying together:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we
forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,
For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever. Amen.**