

November 1, 2020 | Sanctuary worship service

TEXT: [Isaiah 65:17-25](#)

TITLE: **No More**

By the Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy

When God dispatched the prophet Isaiah to call the people of Israel into account, they were in exile, living in a foreign land, under the rule of another nation, and they had lost their hope and joy. There were no celebrations at the birth of a child, the change of seasons brought no hope, only despair was felt when they thought of another year of living away from the promised land. Their memories of life as they knew it in Jerusalem were fading and the need for something to hope for, a desire to return to normalcy had never been greater.

As of yesterday, 9.13 million people have been confirmed to be infected by COVID-19. On Friday, a record numbers of people, 99,321 were diagnosed as COVID positive. Yesterday, in Turkey and Greece, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake caused death and destruction. On Thursday, a 2.0 category hurricane made landfall in southern Louisiana. Zeta was the sixth hurricane to strike this area this year, and it was reported this morning that another tropical storm is forming. Wildfires have ravaged the west coast, the mid-west, Colorado, and Florida destroying millions of acres of land, homes, and lives. At least 9.9 million people lack needed financial resources to pay their rent or mortgage and may eventually experience homelessness. Economic and food insecurity are realities for many people for the first time in their lives and they find themselves parked in cars or standing in long lines waiting for food that their families might eat. Although the unemployment rate has dropped to 7.9%, more than 732,000 people filed for unemployment benefits the week ending October 24.

Racism, white supremacy, police shootings of Black men are depicted daily in cities across the country, peaceful protests and violent rioting persist, and people of color are disproportionately victimized by, experience and suffer all the societal, health, environmental, oppressive policies and practices, and injustices that are prevalent in these United States of America, where we are about to round the corner on one of the most contentious presidential races and political seasons in the history of this country. Ironically, the US Senate was determined to confirm a Supreme court justice in record time. But this same Senate does not have the heart or political will to negotiate and pass a stimulus package to help those they were elected to serve, small businesses, and ultimately the economy.

We may not be living in a foreign land, but we are certainly living in foreign, unusual, unprecedented, and disturbing times...we long for normalcy, a time when it was safe to worship together in the sanctuary, to gather with friends for a night out, to celebrate the holidays with family, to mourn together the death of a loved one, and to celebrate the birth of a child. We long for the ability to travel without fear, for our children to be in school, to discard our collection of masks and breathe freely, deeply and to exhale without fear of harming another. Like the exiled Israelites, we lament and cry out, how long O God, how long?

The God of Israel speaks through the prophet Isaiah, offering a vision for a reversal of the abnormal to normalcy, a vision of a new future that is expansive and beyond anything they could dream, imagine or think. God is about to do a new thing, to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight, no longer shall the sound of weeping or cries of distress be heard.

The prophet Isaiah is not offering empty words or professing an unattainable panacea to placate or pacify the people of God. He is speaking a truth, that from the Israelites' current situation and perspective, may seem impossible. For how can they sing a song of joy in a foreign land; a land where they are oppressed, a land where infants only live a few days or the old do not live out their lifetime?

How can we be joyful when we are isolated, locked in our homes, fearful of infection that might be brought on by interacting with others and potentially result in death? How can we recall and sing songs of praise when our day to day lives have been turned upside down, and there are protests and rioting in the streets? How can we celebrate and be thankful when people have lost their lives, and livelihoods, do not have food to eat, are facing homelessness, or cannot pay their bills? In the words of Karl Marx, has religion become the opiate of the masses?

Not so, for it is precisely in the midst of spiritual, economic, moral, and societal confusion and dissonance that the faithful remain steadfast...standing on the promises of God, reflecting on God's faithfulness in days past, and holding on to the truths that are spoken when we cannot see our way clear, that God has made ways out of no ways. God has been a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our darken paths, and that we are God's children now. Yet, it does not appear what we shall be, but when Christ returns we shall be like him. That there shall be joy in the morning, and suffering, division, and strife shall someday come to an end.

The God who loves us has declared that no more shall there be, hunger, thirst, homelessness or financial insecurity; no more shall there be war or violence, injustice or oppression; no more shall there be brokenness, isolation, or separation; no more shall there be sickness or disparities in healthcare; no more shall the wealth and riches of this world be held by few while others live in poverty and hopelessness. In Christ Jesus, no more shall death have the final word, no more shall there be Jew or Gentile, slave nor free, male and female. And yet, we know that all these things continue.

So, what shall we say of these things? One commentator states "If there is to be a restoration to health, denial had to be replaced with an honest acknowledgment of responsibility." (Paul D. Hanson, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching Isaiah 40-66*, John Knox Press, Louisville: 1999, 245) Beloved, we, the people of God's must take responsibility, admit our complicity, as well as our complacency and live as we have been commanded, to love God and love neighbor as ourselves; to turn from our sins and transgressions of omission and commission, seek God, humble ourselves and pray; put all our hope and trust in God; and work to

eliminate and mitigate the ills of this world. Then we will hear from heaven. When we do, no more shall we live as those who have no hope, for our hope is in Christ Jesus who promised to never leave nor forsake us and who paid the ultimate price that we would be reconciled back to and have abundant life and life eternal.

So, despite everything we are currently experiencing and living through, we faithfully celebrate the birth and baptism of children, and remember those who have passed from life to life eternal; we exuberantly worship virtually, singing hymns of praise, lifting up the name of Jesus, and meet at Table to celebrate the Lord's Supper; we peacefully gather to march in the streets, to stand beside those who have no hope and don't see a way out, to demand justice, equality and equity, to end oppression, racism, poverty and political dysfunction; we go vote our convictions and conscience; and we find ways to visit safely and gather virtually with family and friends.

As the people of God, we rejoice and we have hope, because God is faithful and has continually made ways out of no way, God has continually provided lights for our paths, and shined brightly into our darkest hours. God has opened doors and windows, pouring out blessings that we do not have room to receive them. We have trusted God in the past, and we trust God now. For our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus Christ and his righteousness.

I Am will create new heavens and a new earth, the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. When God says no more, our response shall be Amen!