“Redemption: The Ultimate Good News”

Isaiah 65:17-20, 25; John 21:1, 4-14; Revelation 21:1-5

The Fifth Sunday in the Season of Creation

I’d like to conclude this series of sermons on the good news in this season of creation by picking up where Carol left off last Sunday.

You may recall that an important point Carol made about the Israelites grumbling for water in the wilderness was that God was already ahead of them, waiting for them, ready to provide for them. God had not abandoned them, contrary to what they were feeling and thinking.

Their new life in freedom had grown less secure and predictable than their old life in Egyptian bondage, and they were ready to call it quits. They were ready to stone Moses, retreat into their old life as

Pharaoh's enslaved people, and return to the grim familiar rather than embrace the wide-open freedom of being God's people.

They're afraid of the unknown, of what's going to happen to them.

But what is the unknown? **The unknown is simply that which is beyond our ability to see at this moment.** It may be unknown to us, but it's not unknown to God.

People hesitate, become cranky, even regress when they become anxious. We see that in the Israelites, our spiritual ancestors, and we see it in ourselves.

We see that all-too-human behavior being played out in this morning's extraordinary scene from John.

The disciples have gone backward. Jesus has gone ahead.

They are in the boat. Jesus is on the shore.

They are working hard at something they already know. Jesus is preparing something they don't yet know they need.

They have empty nets. Jesus has breakfast.

The disciples have gotten on with the life they've known rather than step into the world opened up to them by Jesus' resurrection.

The disciples think they are going back to what they know.

But they don't know what we know: Jesus is already ahead of them, waiting for them to catch up.

They go fishing. Jesus goes to the shore.

They cast their nets. Jesus builds a fire.

They come up empty. Jesus has breakfast waiting.

What if redemption is less about finding our way to God than recognizing that God is already ahead of us?

As I've said earlier in this series, creation is the first and greatest miracle, the original good news. Creation is a miracle because even

our best science is not able to say why there is something and not nothing. And that makes existence itself miraculous.

Albert Einstein is supposed to have said that we can go through life as if nothing is a miracle or we can go through life as if everything is a miracle, and he preferred the latter.

Jesus' resurrection was all the proof Jesus' earliest followers needed that he was, indeed, the messiah, the one for whom they had been waiting. The miracle of the resurrection was the sign that the age envisioned by so many for so long, such as we see in our reading from Isaiah, had actually begun.

And notice where that age begins in Isaiah's vision: in this world. Isaiah's vision of redemption is profoundly **this-worldly**:

- Jerusalem becomes a joy.
- People build houses and inhabit them.
- People plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

- Babies survive and grow up.
- Adults live long lives.
- The wolf and lamb feed together.

This isn't escape from creation. **It is creation healed. It is redemption.**

Isaiah’s vision of redemption doesn't cancel creation.

Redemption fulfills creation's promise.

People **living**.

People **building**.

People **planting**.

People **eating**.

Children **growing**.

Creatures **coexisting**.

In other words, redemption is not merely the repair of an abstract "world." It is the restoration of **ordinary, embodied, relational life on another plane and in another age**.

Isaiah imagines redemption as houses inhabited, vineyards harvested, children growing, people living long enough to enjoy the work of their hands. Everyone included. Enough to go around. No need to push or shove.

And John gives us something almost comically ordinary: a resurrected Jesus standing on a beach cooking breakfast.

Perhaps we have made redemption more complicated than the Bible does.

Perhaps redemption looks more like life becoming what God always intended it to be.

Jesus has been raised not for some other far-off world, but for this one. This creation—broken, bruised, damaged, plundered—this creation is so important to God that God not only entered it in the incarnation, God re-entered it in the resurrection with a new way of being in it.

That's one of the most important messages of those post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. Jesus wasn't raised to nothingness; Jesus was raised to somethingness—the something that we call creation. In the simple act of providing breakfast, God unites the spiritual reality of life-giving love with the physical reality of life-giving food. The spiritual and the material are united in breakfast. It's such a simple thing and such an amazing thing:

- Jesus is resurrected.
- Jesus is embodied in a new way.
- Jesus is hungry.
- The disciples are hungry.

- Fish are caught.
- A fire burns.
- Bread is present.
- The lake is present.
- Human beings are present.
- God is present.

And nobody has to leave creation to encounter God.

The resurrected Christ does not say, “Forget all this material stuff. Come join me in heaven.”

He says, instead:

Come join me here in this world, on this shore, at the side of this lake. I will show you how to be with yourselves, with one another, and with the world. I will help you bring heaven to earth. Come have breakfast.

This season of creation helps us think of the arc of the Christian gospel—the good news—this way:

- Creation is God's original good news.
- Incarnation is the good news that God became part of creation.
- Redemption is the ultimate good news, that God's promise for creation is that it will be restored, not abandoned.

Those three beliefs, for me, form the basis of Christian hope. And therefore Christian hope isn't fundamentally about **getting out of this world**. Christian hope is about **God making this world new, including us, so that we are able to become co-creators of heaven on earth with the divine. “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”**

Making this world new is what we see in the final prophetic vision of this morning, from the book of Revelation: God’s future is coming toward us.

John says: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth…”

John doesn't say: “And we human beings ascend into heaven, leaving the mess we’ve made of earth behind.”

He says:

“I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.”

We don’t have to share John’s three-story cosmology to embrace John’s God-driven theology:

We don't climb our way to God. God comes toward us.

The new Jerusalem, the biblical symbol of people living together in justice and peace, comes to us healed of centuries of conflict and suffering.

God's abiding presence seeks us, finds us, and remains with us.

And the voice from the throne says, echoing itself from centuries earlier:

“See, I am making all things new.”

Not “I am making all new things.”

All things new.

Redemption isn't God's decision to throw away creation and start over.

Redemption is God's fiercely loving determination to **renew what God has made.**

Many of us were taught to think of redemption primarily as doing the right things so that we could get our individual souls into heaven when we die. But the biblical vision of redemption is much larger, much richer, and much holier: cosmic, gracious, mysterious, and profoundly creation-affirming.

Redemption is not God's plan for getting us out of creation. Redemption is God's determination to bring creation all the way home.

So, as we mark another World Communion Sunday, perhaps we need to widen the lens of our perspective on what deep communion actually is and see beyond our self-imposed barriers that keep us from one another's tables, from God, and from God's good creation.

If we are willing to orient ourselves with patient trust toward the sacred, with the ears of our hearts tuned to grace, perhaps we can hear more good news than we've ever heard before.

The good news of redemption is not that someday, if we work hard enough, believe correctly enough, or become holy enough, we will finally find God.

The good news is that God is already ahead of us:

Already on the shore.

Already casting the future toward us.

Already making all things new.

We are the ones who are late to the party.

We are the ones who don't recognize the holy in the stranger.

We are the ones still hauling empty nets while breakfast is waiting on the beach.

And so perhaps the work of redemption is not simply to believe in God.

Perhaps it is to notice God.

To lift up our hearts.

To look again.

To recognize what is already happening.

And then, as best we can, **to catch up.**

We continue our worship by singing hymn number 852, “When the Lord Redeems the Very Least”