

I speak to you in the name of our Creator, Christ the light of the world and the Holy Spirit, the one who heals, restores, and transforms us. Amen.

Did anyone notice the tiny people in the image for this week's Sunday event in our newsletter? That's Phil and I in 2007. Those are the stones thrown down from the temple just as Jesus said they would be in today's Gospel. For nearly nineteen centuries, the great stones of the Jerusalem Temple lay buried beneath the rubble on the western side of the Temple Mount. When the Romans destroyed the city in 70 CE, the massive stones of Herod's retaining wall tumbled down onto the street below, crushing shops and leaving a field of ruin that no one cleared away. Over the centuries that followed—Byzantine, Islamic, Crusader, and Ottoman—layers of earth and later construction gradually covered the site. It was not until the excavations in the late 1980s that archaeologists uncovered those same stones, still lying where they had fallen. When I first started going to Israel these stones were still buried beneath the rubble and debris of 1900 years. We were amazed to see them and the excavation around the temple mount when we returned in 2007. Now, every time I am in Jerusalem I visit this spot and think about this text. I think about the destruction of the temple, and of Jerusalem again! The people of God scattered across the Roman Empire and further in what was the great diaspora.

Our canticle from Isaiah 12 today is from the period of the first exile when the Israelites were taken into slavery to Assyria in the late 8th century BCE. The reading from Isaiah 65 is from the time of the destruction of the first temple and exile of Judah to Babylon after 586 BCE. Three periods of destruction and exile in our texts today. We might expect that the thread running through them would be lament or judgement. But it's not. It's actually one of hope and renewal!

In Isaiah 65 God says, “I am about to create new heavens and a new earth.” (65:17) The same word for “create” used in Genesis—when God first spoke the world into being—is used again here. This is not the beginning of creation from nothing, but creation again, out of ruin. God’s work is not patching up what has been broken; it is creative, not merely corrective. Isaiah imagines Jerusalem made new—not by human rebuilding but by divine re-creation. God says, “I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.” (65:18) God exhorts Israel to “Be glad and rejoice forever.” (65:18) The grammar carries the sense of continuing action—an ongoing call to rejoice. Joy, not judgment, is the pulse of this new creation. Isaiah calls the people to celebrate even before they can see renewal taking shape, because God is already at work creating joy where sorrow had reigned.

And Isaiah’s vision is not just spiritual; it is deeply social. “They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit....They shall not labour in vain.” (65:21, 23) That last phrase means literally “not for emptiness.” It speaks to those whose labour has been exploited, whose work has benefited others while they themselves have been left hungry. God promises that the days of futility will end. The new creation is a world where no one’s work is stolen, where each person enjoys the fruit of their labour. This is the prophet’s understanding of liberation—not divine fury, but divine truth spoken for restoration. As Walter Brueggemann and Abraham Heschel remind us, God’s judgment is never wrath for its own sake. It is the truth spoken about what is broken so that new life can begin. God names the injustices that deform human life, not to destroy, but to make restoration possible.

And at the close of the passage, creation itself is reconciled: “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together.” (65:25) The Hebrew word for “feed” usually describes flocks grazing peacefully. Here it is applied to the wolf. Even the predator’s instincts are transformed. This is not escapist utopia; it is the poetic proclamation that the power of God’s peace reaches into every appetite, every conflict, every ecology. The lion, the lamb, the soil, the worker — all find rest. Isaiah’s new creation is both cosmic and concrete—a healed planet, a just economy, a reconciled community. God’s creativity always moves toward wholeness.

That vision spills over into song in our canticle from Isaiah 12: “Surely it is God who saves me; I will trust in him and not be afraid....You shall draw water with rejoicing from the springs of salvation.” (12:2–3) In ancient Israel, that image recalled the festival of Sukkot, when water was carried from the Pool of Siloam to the temple. To “draw water with rejoicing” is to take into our very hands the daily refreshment of salvation. It is a picture of renewal that must be received again and again, like a well that never runs dry.

And at the heart of the song comes this line: “Cry aloud, inhabitants of Zion, ring out your joy, for the great one in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.” (12:6) The phrase “in your midst” can also mean “within you”—the inner part, even the womb. God’s presence is portrayed as intimate, indwelling, sustaining life from within. This is not a distant judge looking down from the heavens but Emmanuel, a God who dwells among and within the people, nurturing new life. That’s the thread of compassion that runs through all of Scripture. God is not merely above the chaos, observing it from afar. God is in the midst of it, holding us as life is held in the womb. Our song of trust is not a denial of reality but a defiant act of hope. We

draw water with rejoicing even when the desert surrounds us, because we trust that the springs of salvation are flowing just beneath the surface.

The reading from Second Thessalonians turns from vision to practice. Some in the early church at Thessalonica had stopped working. They expected Christ's return so soon that they had given up ordinary life altogether. Paul writes to remind them that hope in Christ is not an excuse to withdraw from the world but a call to live more faithfully within it. "We were not idle when we were with you," he says, "but with toil and labour we worked night and day." (2 Thess 3:7–8) He warns them against being "idle"—a word that literally means "out of order." Paul is not condemning rest or inability to work; he is calling the community back into holy rhythm. Disorder enters when people stop contributing to the common good. When Paul says, "Anyone unwilling to work should not eat," (3:10) he is not punishing the poor. He is urging the community to mutual accountability so that no one exploits the generosity of others. His aim is not condemnation but harmony. Then he gives a word that every weary believer needs: "Do not grow weary in doing what is right." (3:13) The phrase can also mean "Do not lose heart in doing beautiful work." It is a lovely turn of phrase, isn't it? The work of love, justice, mercy, and care for the earth is beautiful work—even when it's tiring, even when the results are slow. Paul calls the church to stay steady, to keep showing up. Christian hope is not a reason to withdraw from daily life; it is a reason to participate more fully. This is how the kingdom comes — not all at once, but through the steady rhythm of love made visible.

And then Luke brings us to Jerusalem, where the disciples gaze at the temple, the heart of their world, and marvel at its beauty. They see permanence; Jesus sees impermanence. "The days will come," he says, "when not one stone will be left

upon another; all will be thrown down.” (Luke 21:6) But Jesus isn’t predicting destruction for destruction’s sake. He’s preparing his followers for transformation. The temple that had become a symbol of unshakable security would indeed fall, but God’s presence would not fall with it.

Jesus warns that wars, earthquakes, and persecutions will come, but he assures them: “Do not be terrified.” (Luke 21:9) This is the same compassionate tone we heard in Isaiah: God saying, “Before they call, I will answer” (Isa 65:24). In both cases, divine judgment is not divine fury, but truth spoken for restoration. Jesus names the fragility of their world so that they can discover what can’t be shaken: the enduring love of God. When everything seems to be collapsing, the people of God are not to panic. They are to trust that God’s presence is not confined to buildings or institutions or even the stability of nations. “These things will give you an opportunity to testify,” (21:13) Jesus says. Times of crisis become occasions for witness. “I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand.” (21:15) In other words, when you do not know what to say, the Spirit will give you voice. He tells them they will be betrayed, even by those closest to them, and that some will even die. Yet he adds, “Not a hair of your head will perish.” (21:18) He is not denying suffering; he is assuring them that their lives are held in God. “By your endurance you will gain your souls.” (21:19) That word “endurance” means steadfastness—holding ground in love. Endurance in Christ is not grim survival; it is the quiet strength to keep choosing love, when fear seems easier.

And here we return again to that deep insight from Brueggemann and Heschel: divine judgment is not fury but truth spoken for restoration. Jesus does not predict the fall of the temple to condemn; he names reality so that his followers can

discover the life that endures beyond ruin. He tells the truth about what is temporary so that they can cling to what is eternal. That is the thread of hope and renewal running through all our readings. God is the creator who makes new heavens and new earth; Christ restores and reconciles all things; the Holy Spirit dwells within us, healing and transforming us. The purpose of divine judgment is always renewal. God tells the truth about what harms us so that healing can begin.

What, then, does this mean for us today? We live in a time that feels, in many ways, apocalyptic, doesn't it. We see the shaking of the earth in literal ways: storms, floods, fires. We feel the shaking of institutions, of politics, of community life. Where once we would have thought that these things were strong and solid, now we see them beginning to crack and crumble. We are tempted to despair. But Isaiah calls us to see differently: "Be glad and rejoice forever." (Isaiah 65:18) The prophet imagines joy not as the absence of suffering, but as the heartbeat of God's renewing creation. To rejoice forever is to keep finding reasons for gratitude even in grief, to keep trusting that God's creative energy is still at work in the ruins. And Paul calls us not to lose heart in beautiful work. When compassion feels small against the magnitude of the world's pain, we remember that beauty and goodness are never wasted. Every act of care contributes to the world God is creating. And Jesus calls us to endurance—to the steady, faithful courage that refuses to let fear have the last word. These are words for every anxious heart, for every weary worker, for every community that wonders whether love still matters. There are hopeful signs of God's renewal! Here in St. Mary's we have new folk joining us and we have baptised 4 people this fall, with others interested. At my other church, the AbbeyChurch in downtown Victoria, we are also seeing new folk join us, many are young students from UVic. I read a report this week that young people aged

between 20 and 30 are returning to churches across the UK. They are calling it a quiet revival. The Holy Spirit is at work even and maybe especially at times of great upheaval and the crumbling of our institutions.

I think about how, in 2007, Phil and I saw the stones of the temple, unearthed after 1900 years. And I think about what that says about God's faithfulness. They remind us that even the buried places of our lives—the disappointments, the failures, the griefs we think will never see light again—can be uncovered. God's renewing work reaches even there, to cleanse, heal, and renew. In every age, temples fall and rise. Civilizations crumble and are rebuilt. But the promise of God remains steadfast, for in the final book of the Bible we read: "See, I am making all things new." (Revelation 21:5) Beneath the rubble of history, beneath the rubble of our own hearts, the Creator is still at work.

So don't lose heart in beautiful work. Don't let fear steal your song. Stand firm in hope. Draw water with rejoicing. Open your ears and hearts to what the Holy Spirit is speaking to you. For the Holy One is in our midst, and by our endurance we will gain our souls. Faith is not escape from the world's pain. It's the courage to join God in re-creating it. When we choose joy even in sorrow, we declare that death and destruction are not the end. For even at the grave, we cry Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

Amen.