Sermon on Proper 33 Year C 2022
(Isaiah 65:17-25; 2 Thess 3:6-13)

We breathe, imagine, play and work in a world that God is creating. Notice that I didn’t say “that God created” past tense.

When we say that God created the heavens and the earth we speak the truth; we honour the extraordinary, impossible to imagine achievement of the universe’s magnificence, the fabulous textures and hues of this blue planet awash in the ingredients that allowed molecules to come to consciousness.

But God is more than a Creator, past tense; God is *presently* creat-ing, and God will continue to create, future tense.

And this makes a big difference to how we understand our lives and our partnership with God.

How many of you have lived through a house renovation? Sooner of later most of us do. Often we continue to live in the house while that new kitchen or bathroom or rec-room is being built.

Sometimes—and this is actually an even better metaphor—people build a house and move into it before it’s finished.

In either case, the house is home, it’s the place we love, feel comfortable in and cherish; but it’s a bit tricky because there are certain rooms where there might be nails lying around or parts of the house that have no heat or aren’t fully secured.

The world that God created is, as the scriptures say it, very good, but God isn’t finished with it yet. Blueprints exist for the finished product that are as aspirational as universal justice and peace. Last time I checked those rooms don’t have heat quite yet!

If God acted only in the past, creating a perfect world way back when, a divine Atlantis say that has now been lost through a long gradual fall linked to human evil then we might say that God’s actions of sending the prophets and ultimately Jesus himself are not tied to God’s ongoing creative actions but are nothing more than a kind of romantic hope that humans will dredge of that lost paradise, that we will in the language of Crosby, Stills and Nash, “get back to the garden.”

Then what we do here each Sunday is nothing more than holding up moral examples from the past that we urge each other to heed.

But our foundational stories say something different: “For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth…I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy and its people as a delight.”

The word “create” is *bara* in Hebrew; it’s a special word that is used only when God creates like in Genesis 1:1 “God created *(bara)* the heavens and the earth…”

In the language of poetry, our first reading from Isaiah is proclaiming that in the midst of the devastations caused by the Exile and the feeble attempts to rebuild upon return, God is and will be creating!

In other words, this is a world in chaos, like our own. When we look at the ongoing horrors of war; as we remember those who sacrificed so much we might become hopeless or at least we will if God doesn’t have skin in the game.

That’s actually a good metaphor, God does have skin in the game, in the person of Jesus, and through our baptism, in our persons. So, the upshot is this: God is as active in the chaos of post-exilic Israel, in the chaos of our world as God was in the beginning!

Our small attempts to get something going in and through St. Matthew may seem ridiculous, some days I feel that way, but then I remember no, God is presently working, God is working in such a way that “the former things shall not…come to mind.”

To emphasize what our text says, God’s creating in the present and future is not just about recovering the past; rather, what God is creating is not simply refreshed or repackaged but genuinely new!

Think about it this way, Lloyd, Mr. 80% has been playing away on that piano. Indeed Lloyd, as a Jazz musician has given a large part of his life to drawing out the piano’s potential, it’s amazing flexibility as an instrument, it’s subtleness, it’s sheer melodic capacity. He’s been creative and he continues to create!

And here’s the thing before 1700 no one had ever thought to play a piano because a piano had not been invented. It took the history of music and then of stringed instruments, finally the harpsichord before musical engineers figured out how to make a piano and then the infinite creativity that would unfold over the next centuries became possible.

God’s ongoing, new, creative act is like this; God stepping back, as it were, gauging our creativity, our mistakes, our capacities for good and evil, coaxing, coaching, eventually enabling the emergence of free conscious agents through which God will keep creating in a way that was not possible before us.

Yes, first the apes, then early hominids then finally *homo sapiens sapiens,* the piano of creatures, infinitely subtle, flexible full of capacities.

And God did not create in this infinitely long way in order for it to fall apart. The best is yet to come! It’s not a sincere bromide, a positive thinking phrase that helps us survive tough times; it’s actually good Christian theology!

We access this amazing perspective by faith, by trusting the wisdom that is emerging as we mature, by our cooperation with each other. Our youth might have slipped away from us; opportunities might have come and gone but God’s wisdom is growing in us and through us!

Of course this growing wisdom involves change and that involves change and grief and willingness to take risks. We see this in exilic Israel, at the time of Jesus and then, of course, in our own lives.

So we hold each other’s hands, we support, we encourage, we share the blueprints of God’s house

“One who dies at a hundred will be considered a youth” “the wolf and the lamb will feed together.”

Notice that the prophet moves from statements of God’s intentions to human possibilities: “they shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat…they shall not labour in vain, or bear children for calamity.”

God’s “for I am about to create…” is always fulfilled through “they shall build.”

Our building, our labour is always the litmus test of our theology; not that we work to get God approval; we work and serve with joy for God has already given us approval.

This is Paul’s point in our second reading; if God is creating; if God is in effect saying, “your fulfillment comes from working with me; living your life in light of my ongoing project;” then the temptation to idleness simply betrays some sort of fundamental misunderstanding of what’s going on and who we are, each of us has an incredibly important part to play not just around here but out there and with all your peeps, all your relations.

We notice in our society the signs of despair; it may be in our families, it may from time to time seize our hearts like a vice grip and we feel like simply crawling under our blankets. There is a time to rest!

Kathleen Norris, a famous spirituality writer talks about how we reclaim a life of creative cooperation with God: it’s by re-engaging in ordinary acts: keeping a clean kitchen, walking for exercise and enjoying the breeze on your neck; getting involved in meaningful ways in the community, your congregation and the like, as well as simply enjoying people and the challenges that come from living well!

And we can do this, vs being a busybody or simply giving in to criticism and judgmentalism because we have faith that God is working, creating, even if all we hear are rumours of ill-will and things falling apart. The truth is far more encouraging!

Right now we’re living in a house that is clearly not finished; it’s still being built. That’s what we trying to do here at St. Matt’s. That’s what we’re trying to do in our families and lives.

We know the blueprint is amazing, and we’ve been created precisely to partner with the Spirit’s wisdom to get on with the job. That’s our faith, so let’s enjoy the process!