

Rev. Dr. Craig Lindsey
November 17, 2019
Sermon: Fall Planting

This has become a favorite passage for me, I hope also for you. This is especially true because for us everything is brand new. I had been in ministry in churches for 35 years, but this is all new. We had a home, but then we found a new home, and we have watched as a 25 year old home has become new again. And this week, on Judy's birthday, we hope to move into the reality of that new home here.

Everyone has a favorite time of year. For me it is right now, this time. Not only because everywhere else we ever lived is buried in Ice, Snow and Cold, while we bask in the 80s! Well, not only that... But because this is the time of year when Seed Catalogues come and we do Fall Plantings. Now in Arizona we can plant annuals, pansies and petunias if our HOA allows, which provide brilliant colors but these are gone in a season; However, the perennials, you plant now to lay dormant for the winter months, in hope and expectation of next year and generations from now. It takes "people with experience" to do fall planting. Kindergartners and 1st Graders plant marigolds that bloom quickly, and pick tomatoes and pumpkins which grew in a season. But to plant, knowing that you may not receive the fruit of this plant in your lifetime, but future generations shall harvest, that takes belief in a different vision.

Isaiah believes in the repetitive seasons of time and space. Remember back in Genesis 1, "In the Beginning, when God began to create, the earth was without form a waste and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep." A Waste and Void... God did not create out of nothingness *ex nihilo*, but began to create out of a wasteland and void, in Hebrew what is called *Tohu Wabohu*.

We have all seen photos and video of places after war, bombed out, lifeless, crumbling in decay. A place where each side attempted to win at the cost of all others, and not only lives and nations and cultures, but the land suffered as well. I recall after the attack on September 11th, and everything/everyone was covered in layers of ash, the ground radiated with heat, and there was no sound, no life in what had been the center of Manhattan.

That is the kind of place and time where the High Priest Isaiah prophesied. Through hate, war, conflict, and decay lasting generations, the city of Jerusalem became a waste and a void. Not only the Capital of the Government, Trade and Commerce, but the center of Religion and the Hebrew faith. With destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem, their Worship of God was destroyed, there could be no sacrifices, there could be no celebrations, or feasts.

I have shared with some of you a theory of Conflict; that Conflict, in itself is not good or bad or evil. Conflict represents that two or more of us each care deeply about something and are in relationship. If you did not care, there would be no conflict, you would simply acquiesce and accept or go away. The most basic form of conflict is a disagreement. You are a vegetarian and I eat everything, or you have celiac or some food allergy and I do not. We can "Agree to Disagree", so long as I am not forcing you to eat something which you do not want.

A different level of conflict arises when I am the Pastor. There was a time and culture when being a Pastor demanded respect, we were considered to be on a pedestal of authority and people revered, which is the origin of the title Reverend. Today, because of so many pastoral abuses and corruptions, at

times it feels as though being “of the cloth” makes others suspicious of you. Suffice to say that persons with responsibility: Pastors, Teachers, Officers of the Law and Officers in the Military, Elected Officials, all have authority because of leadership responsibility and there have been abuses in each of these.

The third kind of Conflict takes place in the Safeway parking lot, when we have to get that one parking space ignoring everyone else, believing nothing else will do except that we win. Or on the Entrance ramps to the Highway, even the merging lanes of traffic. We will arrive at our destination just as quickly if we allow others to go ahead than if we take the first position, but we have become conditioned to win, meaning everyone else must lose. This has become a way of life for us today, we live perpetually at this upper level of conflict, needing to win and for others to lose.

Ironically, in Conflict we can never win by increasing aggression. The only means of lowering conflict is to lower our aggression, to lessen our desire to conflict. If I am satisfied eating straw, I have no need to kill to eat. If I am complimentary instead of critical, there is less to be hostile about.

In the 6th Chapter of Isaiah, we had description of the Call of Isaiah, that we routinely lift up as “HERE I AM, SEND ME”, when in fact the Charge God gives to this Priest is to preach and preach to a people whose ears have grown fat, to prophesy and prophesy knowing that the people’s hearts are hardened and they refuse to consider the others’ needs or desires. Sounds a great deal like level 3 Conflict, where there is belief that the resources of the world are limited and I have to get mine before anyone else.

But here, after nearly 60 Chapters of preaching and prophesying, after years of people not listening and destroying Jerusalem and the world, God gifts Isaiah a fresh word: “I am about to create a New Heaven and A New Earth, to recreate Jerusalem as a Joy. Fascinating that God is not going to create Jerusalem elsewhere, God is not going to turn back time. In this Season of the Fall, both Autumn as well as our Fall from Grace where we do not trust one another, where we do not listen to one another, where we fear and feel the need to defend ourselves, in this Fall, God Plants anew.

Imagine a new and different reality. A reality where Lions and Bobcats will choose to eat straw with Oxen; where the Lamb has nothing to fear from the big bad Wolf; where Elephants and Donkeys will work together; where people will not slave building houses for others to occupy; or planting vineyards for others to enjoy; where there is no need for shame or fear or competition but ALL shall be provided for with plenty.

I have a certain sadness about this passage. Because over the last several thousands of years, we have become so disillusioned, so competitive and jaded, we no longer believe miracles are possible. We do not believe God could create a new Heaven and new Earth in this lifetime; instead we have created a separation that this Life: This Reality happens here on this Earth, and Heaven is for the Afterlife. Even more, many believe there is nothing after this life, that acquiring all we can in this life is all that there is.

I believe there can be Heaven and Earth right here. I believe that we can live in Heaven in this place, by planting seeds of hope and trust and joy. The hard part of planting seeds in the Fall, they are not annuals which are going to bear fruit or come to flower immediately in the next few days. Fall Planting requires a Holy Amnesia, that we be willing and able to let go the wounds and sores we have nursed, for a better purpose and new tomorrow.

I recall my home pastor preached a sermon about the importance of not putting this off, but planting these seeds of forgiveness today. Several weeks later a woman greeted him at the door stating that she and her brother had had a terrible falling apart years ago and had not spoken. Graduations and Weddings of their children had taken place, as if the other were dead. Then they received notice that her brother actually had died and she could not go to her brother to make amends ever again.

Part of our Fall Planting is because there is no other time to do so; and while we can debate whether resources are limited and how limited, we are keenly aware that time for us is not forever.

I used to dislike the Fall, as a time where we brace ourselves for the cold; a time where things around us in creation are dying and we know it would be a long time before we saw green again. Then I came to understand that the falling leaves and decay feeds the earth for a new year, and began ordering planting stock.