

Sunday, August 4, 2013
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon – “On All My Holy Mountain”

On all my holy mountain. I want to go there. Our passage from Isaiah today sounds like an amazing travel brochure:

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den. They will not hurt or destroy.

That sounds like a place that I want to take my family and spend two weeks – everyone will be safe, happy and filled with joy.

Don’t we all long for a place where we can feel safe, where we won’t have to worry about the well being of our loved ones.

Here for the second time, (we heard this promise in Chapter 9); Isaiah extends to the remnant the hope of the royal Messiah.

He is imagining a time when the leaders will be perfect.

The Spirit of the Lord shall endow this future leader with the attributes of wisdom, understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and fear of the Lord. He won’t judge by what he sees or hears but by an intrinsic wisdom.

Of course, we all long for such leaders – Isaiah tells us that it is possible.

One commentator calls this “undated hope; a living, ever-present assurance for God’s people.”

This is why this passage speaks as much to the church today as in Isaiah’s time.

Our need for “undated hope” is never-ending.

Isaiah is proposing to his community, a new way of life.

A way in which the fear of one another will be eliminated.

He uses animals for his descriptions, but you can easily substitute others in his promise: The poor shall live with the rich; and the Muslim shall lie down with the Christian; the young and the old together, and a little child shall lead them.

The farmer and the city dweller shall eat together and their young shall lie down together;

the corporate executive shall eat the same as the welfare mom.

The nursing child shall have unlimited health care and the weaned child shall be educated.

They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain.

The peace of this holy mountain is not restricted to one place but encompasses a dramatic change that will come over the whole earth.

When the true order of creation is restored the whole earth is the Lord's hill, indwelt by his holiness.

Again, we hear Isaiah's message that God – holy and powerful – can change everything.

This past week, Barbara Collins and I spent a few days in Syracuse, New York at a conference on faith formation.

It was really about "Embracing the Digital Age."

The leader, John Roberto, characterized faith formation in the following way in the introduction to his book: *This is a book about hope. Hope in the future of faith formation. Hope in the next generation. Hope in churches that are resilient and adaptive in the face of great challenges and opportunities. Hope and trust in God who will do marvelous and wondrous things in our churches and world through us. Faith Formation 2020, he says, will guide your church in envisioning and developing dynamic, engaging, and inspiring faith formation in the second decade of the 21st century.*

Our days were jam packed with information about all of the things that we might do to keep up with the technological revolution.

As I listened to the speakers I tried to envision the world that my sons and their children will live in over the next 50 years.

All of the rules of communication and community have been altered.

We learned about Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, Foursquare, Tumbler, Google chat, etc.

We heard about new ways of teaching and communicating.

It was exciting to imagine the possibilities –though a bit overwhelming.

The take-home message was that the world is changing and if we want to be leaders, we must adapt.

This is not a bad thing...it is just a new thing.

The change that we talked about at our conference this week is not limited to one place – it is worldwide.

For perhaps the first time in the history of creation, we are truly becoming a worldwide community.

Our neighbors can be anywhere.

We can be “friends” with people all over the world.

We can attend Facebook Parties and iGoogle gatherings from the comfort of our own home-- interacting with people from around the globe.

I’m not sure that Isaiah could have possibly imagined the world in which we currently reside, but the fundamental components – our desire for peace and harmony are ageless and timeless.

I think that the first step we must take to creating the peaceful world of Isaiah’s holy mountain is the same as the first steps recommended at the Digital Age conference.

We must choose to participate.

It starts with using our imaginations in a positive way.

We must envision the possibilities.

Our imaginations can work for us or against us.

Two examples:

Monday night we arrived in Syracuse.

When I checked into my room I noticed that the security bar on my door was broken.

I decided it didn’t matter and I went off to dinner.

Well, I am not always comfortable in hotels or unfamiliar places – too many years working with victims of violence against women – so when I woke in the middle of the night, I began to imagine every creepy thing that could happen because my door wasn’t bolted.

It was locked – just not bolted.

So my imagination ran wild with scenarios of hotel staff that had sabotaged the door, knew I was alone, and would surely use their master key to enter my room any minute.

I pictured all the ways that the bolt could have been broken from the door.

I put the chair and the ironing board in front of the door so that I would at least hear the expected intruder.

Needless to say, nothing happened and in the morning when I told the front desk about my broken bolt, it was repaired within the hour.

An example of negative imagination power.

For positive imagination power, I want to tell the story of Sal Khan – creator of the Khan Academy-introduced to us at our conference.

Perhaps you have heard about this.

A young man, working as a Hedge Fund Associate, uses his math skills to produce short instructional videos to tutor his school-age cousin in math.

The videos become popular on YouTube and less than ten years later this young man has revolutionized education with his Khan Academy tutorial videos.

With six million users and the backing of Google and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation he has brought us to a new way of thinking.

Using his imagination, in a positive way, he was able to envision a new approach to learning, labeled *Flipping the Classroom*.

More on this in September!

Perhaps Jesus is our best example of someone who encouraged people to envision a different way of life.

Jesus' message was that life was made up of more than adherence to rules.

He invited his followers to be motivated by love, compassion and justice.

He invited everyone – worldwide – to the table.

This was a radical idea at the time.

Isaiah scholar, J. Alec Motyer reminds us that we have been invited to enter into personal and intimate communion with Jesus.

He points out that Isaiah's prophecies did come to fruition.

With the Messiah the world was re-ordered and transformed.

Divine action removes every obstacle to divine plans.

We must actively participate in transforming the world.

Sometimes we are the lion and sometimes we are the lamb.

Some circumstances call for us to lay aside our power and privilege – other situations call for us to trust those of whom we are afraid.

We must meet one another at the table, believing in our ability to be changed.

Transformation is the work of the church.

Our ultimate trust must be in God – the one who has all of the power.

Let us move boldly and courageously into the future that God has prepared for us.

Let us live in peace with one another on God's holy mountain.

I am going to leave you with three questions to ponder this week. We will not have a dialogue because we have communion today.

Questions:

1. What can you do to transform the world?
2. Do you trust your imagination?
3. Do you trust in God's promise?