

## At the beginning of worship:

If you voted for Hillary Clinton, you are welcome here.

If you voted for Donald Trump, you are welcome here.

If you voted for Gary Johnson or Jill Stein or Joe Exotic....

If you didn't vote because you aren't old enough or aren't registered or didn't get to it or couldn't bring yourself to choose,

You are welcome here.

If this week has brought you to your knees in despair for the hurt and the fear.

If this week has brought you to your knees in hope for a tomorrow you believe to be better.

If this week has brought you to your knees because you just don't know how to respond.

You are welcome here, because here we believe our knees to be the place where we pray to God, to fix what is broken.

And know, in the words of artist Leonard Cohen, who died this week, here you

“Ring the bells that still can ring

Forget your perfect offering

There is a crack in everything

That's how the light gets in.”

This is a place to be, to bring who you are, a child of God.

A place to be, to learn, together who we can be, a community of God, the Body of Christ.

So...

whether the words that follow are words you put on easily

or they are words you can accept reluctantly,

or if they are words you can't believe but want to be true, they are said for all of us.

This is the day that the Lord has made, Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Let us worship God.

Isaiah 65: 17 – 25

- 17 “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth;  
and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.
- 18 But be glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create;  
for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.
- 19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in my people;  
no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress.
- 20 No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old man  
who does not fill out his days, for the child shall die a hundred years old,  
and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.
- 21 They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards  
and eat their fruit.
- 22 They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat;  
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,  
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
- 23 They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity;  
for they shall be the offspring  
of the blessed of the Lord, and their children with them.
- 24 Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.
- 25 The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox;  
and dust shall be the serpent’s food.  
They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the Lord.”

In 2009, Eve Birch, a former librarian who lives in Martinsburg, West Virginia told her story to NPR, the “This I Believe” project. She said,<sup>1</sup>

I used to believe in the American dream that meant a job, a mortgage, cable, credit, warranties, success. I wanted it and worked toward it like everyone else, all of us separately chasing the same thing.

One year, through a series of unhappy events, it all fell apart. I found myself homeless and alone. I had my truck and \$56.

I scoured the countryside for someplace I could rent for the cheapest possible amount. I came upon a shack in an isolated hollow....

It was abandoned, full of broken glass and rubbish. When I pried off the plywood over a window and climbed in, I found something I could put my hands to....

I found the owner and rented the place for \$50 a month. I took a bedroll, a broom, rope, a gun and cooking gear, and cleared a corner to camp in while I worked.

The locals knew nothing about me. But slowly, they started teaching me the art of being a neighbor. They dropped off blankets, candles, tools and canned deer meat, and they began sticking around to chat....They started to teach me a belief in a different American dream — not the one of individual achievement but one of neighborliness.

Men would stop by with wild berries, ice cream, truck parts and bullets to see if I was up for courting. I wasn't, but they were civil anyway. The women on that

mountain worked harder than any I'd ever met. They taught me the value of a whetstone to sharpen my knives, how to store food in the creek and keep it cold and safe. I learned to keep enough for an extra plate for company.

What I had believed in, all those things I thought were the necessary accouterments for a civilized life, were nonexistent in this place. Up on the mountain, my most valuable possessions were my relationships with my neighbors....

The American dream I believe in now is a shared one. It's not so much about what I can get for myself; it's about how we can all get by together.

The kind of world Eve Birch is talking about here, the kind of world where people come together and work for something bigger than themselves because none of them can do it alone, is one aspect of the world Isaiah is describing-- just thousands of years earlier.

*They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; ....while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together...They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain.*

These words are written about the Temple. About the kind of place God wants the temple to be. Professor Corrine Carvalho writes:<sup>ii</sup>

Written around the time of the re-establishment of the Jerusalem temple, contain beautiful poems exalting the cosmic function of the temple. This section of the book begins with a picture of an ideal restoration, where the exclusions found in the practices of the first temple are removed so that everyone, including foreigners and those with bodily deformities can worship together....

The picture of prosperity in Isaiah is not one of personal wealth. It is a picture of communal harmony. And that community is defined in the broadest of terms: it includes even the things that can harm us. The blessings are not demonstrated by the wealth of the elite: there is no prosperous king in this picture. God's blessings are seen when the poorest and most at risk among us live to a ripe old age.

*They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; ....while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together...They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain.*

It's a compelling word the week -four days- after our national election. An election where there were winners and losers, and perhaps the most striking revelation was the depth of the divisions.

It's a compelling word, and maybe the most important word we need to consider this week, just four days after our national election. An election that placed a mirror before us and showed many of us things that we'd rather not see.

Rather not admit. The things that scare us. The biases that take time and lots of light to acknowledge and move past.

But, today is the fifth morning after the election, and it's time to move forward. To take steps forward. To take A step forward.

Not with blindness or pretending. Not with a false proclamation of unity that doesn't have any substance, that doesn't acknowledge the inequities of power, the realities that face us, the divisions, that wolves are still devouring lambs, labor is in vain, there is way, way too much calamity and not nearly enough joy.

Today is the day to take a step towards true unity, one that begins in faithful foundations and flows into everything that we do. The new vision, a new creation--- where violence isn't on the front pages. Full time work can support a family. Differences of race, religion, orientation, and identity are seen as assets, not targets. And no child dies from disease or gun violence.

Does that sound overwhelming? Here's the good news. Today is a new day, and it's the Lord's day. It's Sunday. Resurrection day. A new starting line is right here. To start doing that hard work that our community and our nation needs to do. We live those things out there when we live them in here.

A true unity that begins with listening. Getting to know people who see things differently. Listening. Not to make your point, but to hear the story of another.

Asking the hard questions about why you believe what you believe, and how those beliefs affect your neighbors, your brothers and sisters.

As the saying goes, "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."<sup>iii</sup>

Here's more good news. We have what we need to do this work. This important hard work.

This important, hard work that seems to happen naturally when it begins around the table. Eve Birch—she learned the importance of always keeping an extra plate.

And consider these words from blogger David Nilsen<sup>iv</sup> "it's really hard to feel hateful toward people who just fed you dinner." Some of David's best friends in his church are men with whom he disagrees on quite a bit. He writes:

They are Reformed, with all the beliefs that come with that. They are also among the best men I have ever known...They have told me when they disagree and think I am on dangerous ground theologically, but this has always been framed within the context of love. A relationship of mutual respect has allowed our differences to be a sharpening tool for us rather than a blade of division.

If I were not privileged to be in these relationships, it would be easy for me to demonize or belittle people who hold theological beliefs more conservative than my own. But when the person who holds some doctrinal position diametrically opposed to

my own is sitting across the table from me eating chicken wings while we watch football, laughing at the joke I just made, it becomes a little harder to start a flame war with him online. We're friends, so when we find ourselves stuck between parting ways or talking out differences, we've so far been able to choose the latter.

So, friends, in the wake of this week, we are reminded that what we need, we have to do the work to create a true unity. In fact, there may be no group I know of better equipped to handle this than Presbyterians, because we know food. We know good food. We understand the power of table fellowship.

And that's no accident. Because we start at this table- the communion table. The table where Jesus Christ welcomes us. Where in the blessing and breaking of bread, we recognize Him.

And when we start at this table we begin to live into that world Isaiah describes, that God proclaims.

*They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; ...while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together...They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain.*

Finally, one of my friends wrote something on Facebook this past week that concluded with these words, "Love Wins, I don't know how, but love Wins."

I think that is where I find myself. It's been hard this week realizing the depths of the divides in the world around us, but I'm here this morning- and maybe you are too- because you believe in that win. A win that isn't mine or yours but is ours and the world's. God's. A win we may not be able to see or even at times imagine in these days, but a win we know God already has in mind and has mapped out the steps for us, beginning with the steps we take this day.

*The wolf and the lamb shall feed together...They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain.*

Thanks be to God. Thanks be to God.

---

<sup>i</sup> National Public Radio, Weekend Edition Sunday, April 12, 2009. Independently produced for Weekend Edition Sunday by Jay Allison and Dan Gediman with John Gregory and Viki Merrick  
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=102961694>



<sup>ii</sup> [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1792](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1792)

<sup>iii</sup> Lilla Watson, Aboriginal activists group, Queensland, 1970s

<sup>iv</sup> <http://rachelheldevans.com/guest-post-david-nilsen>