

November 30, 2014

“WONDERFUL”

Isaiah 25:1-10 Revelation 21:1-4 Luke 1:41-55

In the Ninth Chapter of Isaiah, there is a vision of a new king who will bring light to the people who had formerly walked in darkness. Joy would be increased under his reign. Hard times would end, and, not only would there be peace, but all the battle gear would be burned. “*Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end...*” (Isaiah 9:7) There would be nothing but justice and righteousness. Elsewhere, Isaiah describes this reign as having an effect even on the harmony of nature, where wolves and lambs, leopards and kids and lions would all be able to dwell together. This king would be so great that even his name would be called, among other things, *Wonderful!*

Wonderful! “Mr. Wonderful”

Why this feeling? Why this glow?
Why the thrill when you say, “Hello?”
It’s a strange and tender magic you do!
Mister Wonderful, that’s you!

Why this trembling when you speak?
Why this joy when you touch my cheek?
I must tell you what my heart knows is true:
Mr. Wonderful, that’s you!

And why this longing to know your charms;
To spend forever in your arms!?
Oh! There’s much more I could say,
But the words keep slipping away,
And I’m left with only one point of view:
Mr. Wonderful, that’s you!

By Jerry Bock, Larry Holofcener, and George Weiss for the movie *Mr. Wonderful*.

Mr. Wonderful..... That’s the way we should look upon our savior. The thrill and the glow of hearing Christ’s Gospel, the power and the inspiration when we are touched by His Spirit, and the burning desire to know His charms and to spend forever in His presence....should make us able to look upon Jesus as Wonderful. Mr. Wonderful!

“*O Lord, Thou art my God. I will exalt Thee, I will praise Thy Name; for thou hast done wonderful things... Thou hast been a stronghold to the poor, a stronghold to the needy, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat.*” (Isaiah 25:1, 4) This is our God! Our wonderful God! “*And He will destroy... the covering that is cast over all peoples...He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of His people He will take away from all the earth!*” (25:7-8)

And Mary, at a beautiful moment of inspiration, having just been told that the voice of her greeting made the baby, not just kick, but leap in Elizabeth’s womb, lifted her heart to God, called His Name *holy*, and proclaimed the fulfillment of all the wonderful hopes and dreams of all the people the world had ever known: *He has shown strength with His arm, He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree; He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.* (Luke 1:51-53)

We are a people whose vision is that of no more hunger, no more poverty, no more needy people. The Christian vision is one that alters the usual expectations of the world. The imagination of the proud is that the reason they have their abundance is because *they* are chosen. But their pride is scattered, and,

shattered when they begin to realize that those of low degree are exalted too. And not only that, but since in their pride they believe they have *made it*, from God's point of view, they are sent away empty while the searching hungry will be filled with good things.

Ours is a vision that includes an end to the sins and sorrows that plague us, and so there will be no more tears. Ours is a vision that includes even an end to death. Isaiah foresees how God will even *swallow up death forever! ... and death shall be no more...* The former conditions will have passed away. All those things will take on a new meaning. And above all else, because these are our vision, there is hope.

We live in a world, however, that has, according to the United Nations statistics, about 7.127 billion people. And I believe there is, or should be, hope for every single man, woman and child that God has given life. According to Joaquin Mejia, in the mid 17th Century, humans numbered close to 500 million. By 1810, that number had doubled, and the Earth sustained one billion people. In 1968, Anne and Paul Ehrlich wrote the book, *The Population Bomb*. Then the size of the human population was about 3.5 billion. Then in 1991, just twenty years ago, there were 5.3 billion people on this earth. But at the time, they thought it would take less than 35 years, at the current rate of increase, to add one more billion. But the population is growing faster than was projected. Back in the early 90s, they said the world population is expected to stabilize in the year 2030 at about 11.68 billion people. (December 1991 Issue of *Rotarian* magazine).

What is the hope for all those people? How many will be living in poverty? How many will be refugees of war, or, oppressive dictatorships then? How many will be seeking shelter? Where will we be taking care of all the waste produced by all those people? For those of us who believe, truly, believe, that our God is a stronghold for the poor, a stronghold for the needy, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat, what should we, as God's people be doing...now? As Christians who believe that the dwelling of God will always be with His people, that He will wipe away every tear, that death will not be death, and that mourning, crying, and pain will be given no reason to exist, what should we as people of Christ's Kingdom on earth be doing?

What type of society should we be creating? As much as we want a better world for ourselves, we should want it for our children and for our children's children, and for all the generations yet to come, world without end. Amen! Don't give up in the futility of vain apocalyptic expectations that the world will change soon. To do so is to offer no hope now for those who still suffer. And what if the prophetic vision is not as clear as some people think it is? By what ethic should we be living? By an ethic of impending doom and personal escape? Or, by an ethic of universal hope and salvation?

Rev. George Ogle, in a speech at the Annual Dinner for the Rockford Urban Ministries back in 1991, mentioned how even the United States has, "to an alarming degree become divided between rich and poor." He said that, in the decade between 1980 and 1990, the number of billionaires in our country jumped from one to fifty; the number of millionaires increased from about 400,000 to over a million and a half. Meanwhile, during those same years 50 million had sunk into poverty, one fourth of them being children. About six million of our nation had become so impoverished that they had to live on the streets.

It's hard to believe, isn't it? And that was over 20 years ago! What are the statistics today? We want to say, "That can't be true!" So...what if we cut those statistics in half? Would you feel any better with only 25 billionaires and 700,000 millionaires? With only 25 million people living in poverty?

For a people who believe in the exaltation of those of low degree before God, we should be honoring them with visionary deeds, for when the judgment comes, we will be numbered among the righteous *only if* when we see the hungry, we feed them; *only if*, when we see the thirsty, we give them fresh water to drink; *only if*, when we see the stranger, we welcome them; *only if*, when we see the naked, we clothe them; *only if*, when we see the sick, we visit them; and *only if*, when we know someone in prison, we visit them. (Matthew 25:35-36)

But, what do we do? We end up pointing the finger of blame rather than opening the hand of hope and help. We tend to want to be about the business of blaming in such a way that you'd think people got a reward for finding fault. What we should be about is service, mission, compassion, good works. We are challenged to be Good Samaritans, not just on the road to Jericho, but everywhere, loving our

neighbors as ourselves, doing unto others as we would have them do unto us. We are challenged to an ethic of systematic self-denial.

People will know that Jesus is wonderful when the people who follow Jesus are wonderful. If Jesus is the King named Wonderful in the vision of Isaiah, then we are to be ambassadors of the Wonderful! Part of what it means to be a Christian is to give your life to Christ the King. Your life is your greatest gift. Don't get wrapped up in self. Give yourself by offering not just your money (though that *is* a very good start), but your time, your hands, your voice, your heart.

Offer yourself in such a way that you will wipe away the tears of sorrow from at least a few faces; in such a way that you will take away the reproach of at least a few people; in such a way that you will exalt those of low degree; in such a way that you will fill the hungry with good things; in such a way that you will reveal that the dwelling of God is with His people. Give yourself in such a way that you will prove that the former things have passed away!

Behold, God is making all things new!

Our God is wonderful!!!