

## *Holy Extreme Makeover!*

Isaiah 65: 17-25      Luke 21: 5-19

After that stunning election upset on Tuesday night, we can say for certain that America is going to get a makeover. The folks who supported Mr. Trump would say that an extreme makeover is exactly what America needs. The folks who supported Mrs. Clinton are cringing in fear that the gay decorator with the perfect ideas for their home is being replaced by Uncle Bobby who wants to create a man-cave out of your dining room. Okay, the fears are far worse than that.

We don't really know what's coming in our USA makeover. Mr. Trump marked his brand during the campaign with cheer lines, or jeer lines, depending on the moment. He has been and remains notoriously vague **and** fluid about what exactly he plans to do, how he plans to do it, or in the end, if he plans to do it at all. While the GOP line on repealing and replacing Obamacare has been echoed faithfully by Mr. Trump during the campaign, word is now that there are parts he wants to keep, and maybe it won't be repealed *per se*. Who really knows? Until there is a firm proposal on the table, we can only speculate, so we'll have to wait and see.

Like with Trump supporters, makeovers tend to be things that advocates are enthusiastic about, while others express distinct unease at the thought of such radical changes. My wife's late (as in deceased) favorite TV show, *What Not to Wear*, would have enthusiastic supporters of change – the victim's friends and the show's hosts – who tried to convince the victim that this was really going to be awesome for them. In most cases, the victim became a convert and was thrilled by the makeover outcome. Although every once in a while, there would be a victim who would end up feeling, well, victimized.

When my son moved out, the layers of dust in his bedroom had hardly seen the light of day before my wife went into makeover mode. The furniture was re-arranged, flower picture replaced school and community awards, new curtains appeared, along with new flowery bedspread and sheets, followed by my wife's signature trademark, a ridiculous number of pillows. No, really, like 10 pillows of different shapes and sizes. You have to toss aside all these pillows before you can even get into the bed. Not for me; it's turn down the covers, drop in, and conk out. Anyway, she had her idea of a makeover, and it was really different from mine, but thankfully it didn't really affect me at all.

Makeovers get considered because whatever you've got simply isn't passing muster any longer. It's gotten old, or it doesn't really work, or the situation has changed, or the situation won't change until there is a makeover, or whatever, it needs an overhaul to work better.

There are sacred makeovers in scripture. The best ones reach for metaphor in soaring visions as poetic imagination is unleashed by one of the great prophets. They perceive what the mind's eye can hardly fathom as their vision transforms reality into

sacred space. Isaiah is the most familiarly quoted of the prophets because of his skill in envisioning the sacred makeover.

In Jerusalem at the time of Third Isaiah, things were bleak. (We call it Third Isaiah since the prophet's successors write about the situation about 20 years after the return from exile in Babylon. Third Isaiah is a contemporary of Haggai whose words we considered last week.) People were despairing as they labored under Persian rule, saw the rich getting richer, and their families devastated by poverty and disease. As hope ebbed, prophets like Haggai and Third Isaiah came forward to instill hope and convey the promise of God.

Here in Isaiah 65, God announces through the prophet that a new creation will be undertaken, something so unbelievable that *the former things will not be remembered*. God will return joy, prosperity, and long life to his people as they become *a people blessed by the Lord*. The holy city of Jerusalem will be a place of peace and blessing as *the wolf and the lamb will feed together* instead of one seeking to destroy and consume the other, the more common experience of God's people.

God's holy extreme makeover presents a stunning vision of what God promises to accomplish. The people had been devastated by events and felt exploited, insecure, and hopeless that anything was going to change. Yet God promises a new creation, *new heavens and a new earth* – suggesting a new relationship between God and his people that would transform their way of life. The promises are extravagant, but they are made by God.

God's word is that families will be able to live in the places that they made their home, and enjoy the true value of their labor – *no longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat*. This overturns the curse announced by Amos on the people when he said, *You have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine*.

People will work at jobs where they're paid a living wage, not always toiling for wages that *can't* pay for rent, food, clothing and medical care. Workers will not be tossed out like an unwanted expense whenever the economy has a downturn, not even for the sake of earnings reports, investor returns, or share price.

And people will have health care, able to live long lives – as Isaiah said: *Never again will there be ... an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years*. The specter of dire poverty due to illness will cease as the health and well-being of people supersede the entrenched bureaucrats, the cash-soaked lobbyists and the lamest politics that ignores the suffering of so many of the people of God. Truly, God promises to accomplish amazing things that will change the inheritance of one generation to the next when Isaiah announces, *they will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune*.

Yet the most powerful verses come at the end. *The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain.* Each section describes a form of **reversal** of the standard order. As already mentioned, the wolf and the lamb will cease to be predator and prey, one strong and ruthless, the other weak and defenseless. The wolf will no longer be prowling in hunt for its next victim, but will cease its self-serving hostility and be joined to the family of God's children.

A similar note is sounded in: *the lion will eat straw like the ox.* Again, the predatory pattern gets transformed, changing the very nature of lions who saw those weaker as fair game to be consumed, as commodities to be exploited, as a source of personal benefit. Now the lion abandons its self-serving practices and joins the ox in munching on straw, coming into the community of God's providence and blessing.

Finally, the prophet says: *but dust will be the serpent's food.* Here the serpent from the Garden of Eden makes an appearance, reflecting those sinful who refuse to repent of their selfishness, their greed, their exploitation, and their corruption. For those snakes, let them dine on a diet of dust, for they will no longer be allowed to sneak up on God's people, poisoning their lives, swallowing them whole in gluttony. Dust will be all they get.

Now *that's* an extreme makeover. Of course, the prophet's powerful expressions have endured through the centuries, ever reflecting the promise of God amid the despair of how the world has so fully corrupted God's good creation in every generation.

Turning now to Luke 21, Jesus is talking about a holy extreme makeover of another type in his discussion with his disciples. Now in Jerusalem, in the courts of the great Temple, the disciples are awestruck at the majestic splendor of the edifice which is covered in expensive adornments, brilliant gold plates, and precious white stone, appearing at a distance as if it were a shimmering snow-capped mountain. The magnificent and opulent building is a marvel that likely exceeded the wildest dreams of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zerubbabel, and Third Isaiah. The disciples must be recalling the promises foretold by those ancients, knowing that God has triumphed in this fantastic temple and fulfilled God's promise. Isn't this also a sign to them of how they will be sustained in the success of their mission with Jesus?

As is often the case, Jesus knows what they're thinking. It's time for a lesson. Jesus begins by telling them, *the time will come when not one stone will be left on another, every one of them will be thrown down.* It would be like traveling to lower Manhattan and beholding the World Trade Center and having someone say, "the time will come when these buildings are brought down in raging flames, reduced to rubble and dust." It's utterly shocking.

The disciples cannot imagine this. They quickly ask when this will happen and what signs will show this is about to occur. Jesus gives them the big brush strokes for starters, something worthy of taking down the great Temple. There will be wars, earthquakes, famines, pestilence, fearful events, and great signs.

Then he says, ***But before all this***, Jesus says, *they will* mess you up. You'll get turned in by your parents, turned on by your sisters and brothers, given up by your best friends. They will get you arrested, beaten, tortured, brutalized and *then* they'll put some of you to death. In other words, the end times will come, but you're going to have a very full plate long before that ever happens. Don't worry about the end times when you've got big troubles in the present times.

This is not the kind of holy extreme makeover that the disciples expected to hear. But Jesus makes the point that this is about more than the buildings, the holy city, the empire, the way of life, or anything else. This extreme makeover is about **you** as faithful followers of the way of Jesus. Your persecution is designed to bring you before the powers, the loathsome, demonic powers of empire, privilege, wealth, and comfortable indifference. These are the ones to whom the way of faith, the way of love, compassion, justice and peace **demand**s that you give witness. And if that means you get handed over to the executioner, so be it, for the blessing of God will be yours. Jesus says, *All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair on your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life.* Now **that's** a holy extreme makeover!

How can Jesus know this will be their destiny? If they stick around a few days, they'll see all of that happen to Jesus himself.

Some would repent, some would believe, some would follow. But the powers of the world wanted their fat stake safe and secure. They wanted to be rid of this rebellious spirit and figured they could silence him just as they had silenced any opponent previously. They'd take his life. Only Jesus' life couldn't be taken from him; the sovereign power of God ensured that. So those who are faithful to the way of the Lord can know that the sovereign power of God will ensure life for them, too.

Each of our lives should always be prepared for a holy extreme makeover, particularly if we think we're going to stand with our Savior for the values and vision of the Kingdom that he espoused, and that God espoused through the prophets long before Jesus. We need to be willing to lose our lives, or better, lose what our lives have become. God is ready to give us a makeover, but our resistance needs to get turned off and our faith turned on. Our hearts need to be opened up and our spirits need to embrace what is holy and loving and gracious. Our hands need to become unclenched from our rigid, desperate hold to what we fear we're losing, and instead open and reach out for the promise that seems an incredible, gracious, powerful blessing that would evade our grasp otherwise.

Whatever the world builds is passing, but what God does with the faithful in holy extreme makeover transcends the weak reach of the world's powers and brings disciples into the Kingdom of new life eternally.