

THE CHURCH WITHOUT WALLS

Answering Our Own Prayers

Isaiah 65:17-25

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LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/church-without-walls-answering-our-own-prayers/>

After our holiday break, we resume our discussion of our church's movement from God's dream to our deeds—Setting Sail. Remember the ship, driven by the wind of the Spirit, with five sails (each sail is an initiative and each initiative has its own sermon series). Those five big dreams for FBC JC are: God-centered worship, life-changing faith, authentic relationships, community transformation and global partners. During January, we are focused on community transformation, and the sermon series is entitled, "The Church Without Walls."

Unfortunately, here's what has happened. The Church woke up in the 21st century and realized that we had become disconnected from two very significant groups: the younger generation and our own local communities. And it turns out that the two are related, because millennials and other adults who don't give a rip about doctrine are passionate about community engagement. A friend of mine summarized it well. He said young adults are saying they are tired of hearing people say, "We'll pray about these problems." And nothing happens. They want to see action!

So I begin with two questions. First, how well do we know our community? I mean really know it. Not just the paths you usually tread. This note from an elementary student: "I wish my teacher knew that my dad works two jobs and I don't see him much." I'll bet all the elementary teachers—and some parents here this morning can identify with that! Here's the second question. How much do we really love our community? Really love it as Christ does?

Now on the heels of Christmas and the celebration of the incarnation (God made flesh), we shouldn't be surprised that the Gospel is so much about this world. The boundary line between should be intentionally blurry and semi-permeable. Gone is the old model of "you all come" program-driven churches. The church goes to the world, to serve. And from our congregational conversations during Imagine If last year, I am proud so say you got this. You said, "We want to do more of this community engagement! We want to be Isaiah 65-kind of people!"

Do you hear how this-worldly Isaiah 65 is? Healthy babies born (v. 20); senior adults living long lives (v. 20); adequate housing and fulfilling labor (v. 21-23); harmony in nature, among animals (v. 25). In fact, proof that this is not a description of heaven, but of God's dream for this world is found in v. 20: People still die; they just die after a long, full life. So, if we're going to give up on Jefferson City, our community, and focus only on heaven, then when we pray The Lord's Prayer and come to the phrase, "thy kingdom come...on earth as it is in heaven..." we should insert (Lord, we really don't mean this part!). C.S. Lewis wrote that our problem is not that we desire too much but that we desire too little. We no longer expect a new world; we only hope to be better adjusted to the present world [*The Weight of Glory*].

In the famous children's movie, "Monsters, Inc.," the electrical power for the city is generated by children's screams and shrieks. At the end of the movie, the city is transformed, and it is now

children's laughter which generates light and life. Could that be what Isaiah is saying? Could that be our call to community transformation? Diana Butler Bass has said that justice is implementing God's dream in everyday life. There it is. Isaiah's vision...and ours.

Someone once asked Mother Teresa the secret which enabled her to work day after day among the poorest of the poor. Her simple answer? "I pray." She believed that working sacrificially in a community to meet needs and strive for justice would fade after a year or two unless it has the deep roots of prayer and a relationship with God. She said we keep praying for God's kingdom to come and eventually we put feet to our prayers. We answer our own prayers. I heard a story once about a man who was praying, saying, "God, why don't you do something about all the shootings, hatred, poverty, global hunger, injustice, prejudice?" And God replied, "I was going to ask you the same thing!"

That's why the key to this entire passage of scripture may well be v. 19: "I will...delight in my people." God enjoys us. Delights in us. Craves, longs for a relationship with us. Through Jesus Christ His Son, God offers this. And then God plants in us a love so fierce that we begin to love God's community the way He does.