

Isaiah 25:6-9

25:6 On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.

25:7 And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever.

25:8 Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.

25:9 It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

This is Our God

It's been two years since we gathered in this space for this special service. So much has happened over that time. It has been, in many many ways, a very difficult two years. In the lengthening shadow of the pandemic - the pandemic that has altered our daily lives, complicated our grief, and added loss upon loss to our burdens - this scripture activates a longing deep within me for Isaiah's vision of the fruition of God's dream for the world. A rich feast shared on a mountaintop, the

presence of God so palpable that we can feel God wiping the tears from our faces, the shroud of death that has been spread over all nations dissolved. It is a vision of God's Love for the world fully realized, fully embodied - a vision of what it might look like if we allowed that love to be the ultimate ruling force in our lives and in our world.

“And on that day, we will say - this is our God, the One we have waited for, let us be glad and rejoice in God's salvation.” I hold this image in my mind and I can almost taste the feast, almost feel God's hands wiping away my tears, almost hear the shouts of joy as the shroud of COVID, the shroud of grief and loss, the shroud of death evaporates and is no more.

Isaiah is speaking to his community - a community threatened with violence, riddled with injustice, a community that is losing faith- and, even as he urges them to turn around, do better, seek God - he also casts this vision of where they - where we - are headed, a vision of what God hopes for all nations. It is a beautiful vision. But we are not there quite yet.

Paul says in his letter to the Romans - another community in crisis - “now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part, then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.” We are not quite there yet.

And still. Isaiah's vision inspires me to recognize all of the times God has broken through our loss, broken through the disruption of the pandemic, broken through even the shroud of death to assure us that even in the

midst of this difficult reality we find ourselves in, God is right here with us. I wanted to share some of those glimmers of salvation that I have witnessed over the past years. I hope that you will share your glimmers as well - when we name our joys and concerns, when we gather after the service, when we see one another during the week. When we share our experiences of God's inbreaking with one another, our hope is multiplied and strengthened. Many of you have shared some of the moments I'm naming as well. And your presence then and now multiplies and strengthens my hope.

A community of people faithfully gathering every night online to share their gratuities and struggles

Another community gathering every week to have hard conversations and ponder how we might make the world more just.

Gathering outside on a cold April morning to celebrate the Resurrection.

Crocus breaking through the snow

An entire community coming together to celebrate 33 years of ministry together

An eagle perching in view during a funeral held on the riverside

Baptizing a teenager on a beautiful summer afternoon.

Sacred space held for a loved one in their last days

The glory of a tree in full autumn regalia

The smile of a newborn

A vulnerable story shared in community

Paraments woven by the loving hands of one now gone

Tears shed in the arms of a friend

A gathering of grieving friends and family

At each one of these moments, I felt my soul proclaiming - There! This is our God! Each of these moments, I have felt the love of God overflowing around me. And, here's the real miracle - even though these glimmering moments are not the fully realized vision that Isaiah casts so beautifully, they are enough. Even a sip of the presence of God is enough to fill my soul to the brim. Every time I'm pulled into connection - with community, with loved ones, with each one of you, with God - I find my soul rejoicing in the salvation of God.

Salvation is - for me at least - another word for connection - it is the miracle that dissolves the boundaries between us and one another,

between us and God, between us and our beloved that have joined the cloud of witnesses that we honor today.

Every one of the saints that we will name today has been a conduit for the presence of God at one - or many many - times in their lives. When we read each name, we will ring a bell - may you hear in these names and in the chime of the bell that proclamation - "This is our God" - among us. Within us. Working in and through each of us to pull us ever closer to the mountain of God's Dream - for a time when there will be no more pandemics, no more grief, no more hunger or thirst, no more death.

Isaiah's vision is nearly 3000 years old. Paul's promise is almost 2000 years old. Though the time they anticipate seems so far beyond us - the hope for it endures. Perhaps because it feels true. Perhaps because the glimmers of God that we experience are so rich and so real that, beneath our skepticism, beneath our need for concrete proof, we have a deep knowing that God is up to something beyond our greatest imagination, our greatest hopes. When we feel the love of God breaking into our lives, something in us recognizes exactly what we are here for. "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part, then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now, faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love." Amen.