

THE GIFT OF A NEW PERSPECTIVE

Isaiah 65:17-25; Revelation 21:1-7

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The cast from the *Derry Girls* was on the holiday version of the *Great British Bake-off* recently released on Netflix. Nicola had trouble with her sponge. (That's a cake, for those who aren't bakers or aficionados of this baking competition.) She forgot that in making a Swiss roll, you needed to roll the sponge while it was still warm. So the first sponge cracked, well, more like crumbled when she went to roll it. The second sponge had to be tossed because she bumped the temperature on the oven and burned the top. The third sponge was perfect, but if you've watched this show before, you know that the bakes are timed, so Nicola had very little time for the other elements of the trifle that she was making. Needless to say the finished product was a disaster. The "do-overs" cost her.

Do-overs usually do. Mulligans on the golf course usually results in chasing down more balls or losing balls or slowing up the game. On a crowded day on the course, the group behind you is generally not happy to see you taking extra strokes.

I recently bought a composter that required assembly. At one point I discovered that I had used the wrong screw in part of the assembly. The do-over there required undoing that part, lengthening the time the project should have taken.

These are all trivial things, but often do-overs are more costly: the calculus class you're taking for the second time, or the plumber you call to fix that "simple" home repair you messed up. Do-overs in relationships are almost never easy matters. Forgive and forget doesn't usually apply. And there are so many things where second chances aren't even possible: the botched job interview, excessive force gone awry, and cruel comments overheard.

The Bible is full of people who would like a second chance. I imagine Cain wished he hadn't killed his brother Abel, that David maybe wished he hadn't strayed with Bathsheba, and that Judas wished he hadn't betrayed Jesus. Even God has regrets, the flood being perhaps the most notable.

Given how often we mess up, it's no surprise that today's scriptures are among the most loved. "For I am about to create a new heaven and a new earth," says God to the people of Israel in exile. The city of their birth will bring them joy again. Its people will be a delight. Babies won't die. People will live long lives. Dreams will be realized. People will live in their own home, will receive the benefits from their labor and there'll be peace.

John, himself in exile on the isle of Patmos, says in his vision, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth." God will dwell in the city. The thirsty will receive living water. No death, no mourning, no crying, and no pain. Isaiah and John describe the best possible second

chance: a world in which the past is forgotten and the future is everything one could hope for.

These two visions invite us not just to hope for a better world, but to see the world with new eyes. In our world, do-overs require a great deal of work and seldom undo the negative impact of our actions completely. I can find forgiveness for a trust betrayed, but forgetfulness is a long time coming. The relationship is really never the same. Isaiah and John show us worlds where the healing is complete, where joy and delight take over.

It's not simply a reworked perspective where forgiveness is sought and amends are made, and measures are taken to prevent a repetition of harm. It's a new perspective that sees a new world. It invites us to see what is right with the world.

In our world, the gift of a new perspective sees people committed to the welfare of others, even in the midst of the pandemic. It sees nurses delivering care to patients without regard to precautions observed or not. It sees families foregoing gathering to slow the spread of the virus. It sees people doing takeout to keep the restaurants afloat, teachers, parents, and administrators reworking the educational system to help our children continue learning. It sees republicans and democrats wearing masks and protesting racism because the lives of others mean as much to them as their own.

The gift of a new perspective sees racism differently. Instead of seeing it as part of a person's immutable character, it sees the possibility for transformation as we seek to understand the systems and history that traps us in ignorance and arrogance. It seeks to let go of assumptions and presumptions that separate us one from another. I so enjoyed zooming last week with the small group studying racism last week and hearing their research on little-known people of color and their achievements. It's one thing to believe that people of color can do anything, but quite another to hear about a particular African American who was a respected and significant architect and another who was a doctor who had so many children named after him because of the trust engendered in him as he delivered these children. The gift of a new perspective sees individuals, not just an idea.

After over 30 years of preaching, I still love Jesus for the gift of a new perspective. He never ceases to surprise me. The things he says and the way he looks at people sometimes shock and sometimes gently lure me into seeing the kingdom of God as he saw it. The Sermon on the Mount, the parables, encounters with the woman of Samaria and the man born blind, and his deep love for the disciples offer great insight into the new heaven and the new earth spoken of by Isaiah and John.

It's tempting to settle for the better world over the new world. We have trouble letting go of the past. We hold grudges. We remember our hurts. We tell ourselves how unwise it would be to forget them. To some extent it's true, but the world God intends for us is a world defined by love, a world that celebrates differences, and a world where healing is complete and thorough.

It's rare to live in such a world, but with the gift of a new perspective, with the vision of Isaiah or John, we can learn to see it better and to live toward it. That's why Jesus came, why he lived and walked among us, why he taught and healed and forgave people. Advent draws our attention back to the new heaven and the new earth that God intends for us. May we see in the birth of Jesus God's love for the world, for you and for me, that we might live into the new heaven and new earth where there is neither pain nor sorrow.

Amen.