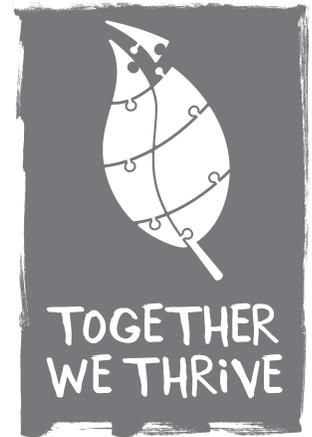


Sermon Notes

CFGB Sunday 2017

By Rev. Kris VanEngen



*Never again will there be in it
an infant who lives but a few days,
or an old man who does not live out his years;
the one who dies at a hundred
will be thought a mere child;
the one who fails to reach a hundred
will be considered accursed.
They will build houses and dwell in them;
they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
No longer will they build houses and others live in them,
or plant and others eat.
For as the days of a tree,
so will be the days of my people;
my chosen ones will long enjoy
the work of their hands.
They will not labour in vain,
nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune;
for they will be a people blessed by the Lord,
they and their descendants with them.*

—Isaiah 65:20-23

Isaiah 65:20-23 lays out a vision for the Kingdom of God coming near. It says that children will not pass away in their first days, adults will live beyond 100, people will dwell in the houses they build and eat the fruit of their labour.

Isaiah's vision stands in contrast to the lost lives we see resulting from natural disasters and systemic oppression. Our reality is people enslaved to debt, farmers who are at the mercy of their buyers, land and weather that don't reliably produce a harvest, women who lose their land after the loss of a spouse because of their gender, children who struggle to grow physically and people who are literally trafficked and forced into a life of slavery.

Standing in the middle of this suffering the church senses a call to build God's kingdom and protect the poor.

This is a powerful draw but there is a part of it that is slightly off—Jesus never told us to *build* the Kingdom.

Jesus said things like, “The kingdom of God has come near.” “The kingdom of God is at hand.” “The kingdom is like a treasure that someone finds in field.” “The kingdom is like a mustard seed which is the smallest of seeds on earth. Yet when planted it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants.” The kingdom is happening and we the church are the ambassadors who point out its reality and give ourselves to its king. We live by its currency. The church expects this vision of life and we point to its reality with hopeful words and with community actions that truly put families on a path of full healthy life.

God’s Holy Spirit will not allow us to be comfortable with suffering under oppressive systems. When we see generational poverty or a community not having what it needs to bounce back from a disaster we feel pain too. Our hope is not in our own work it is in Isaiah’s vision.

When we say, “together we thrive,” we are saying that *together* Isaiah’s vision becomes a reality. Together as churches and communities and more importantly together with God’s kingdom. We are together with one another and our real hope for an end to suffering comes because we are *together* with Jesus—the fulfiller of Isaiah’s vision.

We live as members of God’s Kingdom. We are his faithful stewards. Whatever our denomination or congregation, whatever disaster response agency we partner with, we all stand together as Kingdom citizens. We know that Jesus sits with us in our suffering. We take action together because we know that God’s kingdom is like a powerful mustard seed that will keep growing and bringing with it protection and transformation.