



December 15, 2025

Agents of Hope

The 65th chapter of Isaiah opens with God speaking. Through voice of the prophet in *The Message*, God says: “I’ve made myself available to those who haven’t bothered to ask. I’m here, ready to be found by those who haven’t bothered to look. I kept saying ‘I’m here, I’m right here’ to a nation that ignored me. I reached out day after day to a people who turned their backs on me, People who make wrong turns, who insist on doing things their own way. They get on my nerves, are rude to my face day after day, Make up their own kitchen religion, a potluck religious stew.”

Those poignant words lay bare the heart of God. God’s chosen people recently returned from exile where for two generations they were bereft of land and king and Temple. Now home in the Promised Land, Jerusalem and the Temple are rebuilt, but it’s no utopia. People are still suffering. Many of them blame God saying he’s too deaf to hear their pleas and too weak to save them. Feeling disillusioned and hopeless, many are becoming indifferent toward God or worse – they’re beginning to worship idols.

God responds to this sorry situation in the remainder of the chapter: “For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth....” God won’t punish all for the sins of a few. God will preserve the faithful. What’s more, through their descendants the whole cosmos will one day experience God’s shalom. Then, “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together [and] they shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain.”

Isaiah announces God’s re-creation of the world and tells what it will be

like by describing the holy city, Jerusalem. The picture Isaiah paints is at once God's promised, still future world and our here and now world. The future God names is a place of utter peace and harmony where houses still are built, fields still are planted, children still are born and people still die, but only at a ripe, old age. Indeed, in that day, former suffering will be forgotten and joy will abound for God and God's people.

That future isn't a reality yet in Isaiah's day. God is speaking these words to comfort and challenge Israel to live into that promised future. In the New Jerusalem, God's people will be blessed with long life, abundant food, and purposeful work. Their relationship with God will be so intimate that God will answer their needs even before they ask. Such intimacy with God will transform the world into what God created it to be: a place of mercy, justice and peace. Indeed, God intends his people not only to be signs of God's hope for the whole world but to also be agents of that hope.

Five hundred years after God spoke these words of hope to Israel and to the whole world through them, God sent Jesus to incarnate that hope once and for all. Looking back on God's promised future, Christians have always seen Jesus Christ as the way God fulfilled that promise. The witness of the New Testament is that in Jesus' life, death and resurrection God made all things new. The Apostle Paul sums it up beautifully: "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"^[1]

Now, obviously, that future isn't a reality in our day, either. In fact, the world seems to be more of a mess than it used to be. The progress we've made expanding freedom and equality to all and protecting our fragile planet is declining. What's more, we can each recount multiple reasons for our personal angst.

By the time Luke writes his Gospel, Jesus' death and resurrection and the Temple's destruction are in the past. Believers are living the reality of being persecuted in Jesus' name. In their suffering, they wonder when Jesus will return and when God's earthly kingdom will come. Some fear they've missed it. How are they supposed to recognize the end of this world?

Every generation asks that same question. As Christians, we must remember that Jesus never answers the end-time question or uses it to scare people into faith. Instead of predicting the end and saying believers will be exempt from suffering, he prescribes how to be faithful no matter what. He warns us not to be led astray by false teachers who say the end is near. And no matter how bad things get, he says we're not to be terrified. Instead, we're to use it as an opportunity to witness to our faith in God. Indeed, Jesus promises to give us the words and wisdom we need to speak our faith and endure all hardship.

Both Isaiah and Luke emphasize God's sovereignty and compassion. Both announce God's promised future and urge us to live into it. Both speak of God's call to us to be agents of hope in the world.

These are words we desperately need to hear today. Increasingly, the Christian Church is being sidelined in our culture. The majority of Americans may still say they're Christians but many are indifferent to practicing the faith. The reality is that only 49% of Americans say that faith is an important part of their lives as of November 2025, a 17% drop since 2015.^[ii] We live in a secular culture. That makes it an indifferent, if not hostile, environment in which to live out our calling as Jesus' disciples.

There is some good news in that sad fact, however. We now have new opportunities to witness to the gospel. Genuine community is in short supply today and the world is a frightening place to many. People need hope. We as Christians have much to share that can help and we as Presbyterians have a view of God's future that can help, too.

Our Reformed theology declares that we may not know precisely what the future holds, but we know precisely who holds it. God sent Jesus into human history to embody God's love for us. He willingly suffered to restore the intimate relationship God wants to have with us, the intimate relationship our sin prevents us from having. Jesus' death and resurrection is proof positive that the future God wills for us is good. When darkness confronts us, the people we love, or the planet we share, our Christian faith speaks a word of hope like nothing else. "Our hope, our future has a name, a face; that name, that face is Jesus."^[iii] At the end of all time, he stands as the Savior of the world and the Lord of all; God in the flesh who gave his life to make all things new.

The world needs to hear that hope. We who've found a church home in this genuinely warm and caring community need to tell people that and invite them to experience it. We who worship regularly, who find joy and peace, guidance and strength through the gospel that is proclaimed in scripture, sermon and song, need to share that good news. We who find Bible study exciting and meaningful need to talk about the help and hope God's Word provides. We who believe Jesus calls us to care for those who are hurting and stand beside those who are oppressed need to declare that it is in Jesus' name that we give and serve. In other words, we need to be ready, willing, and able to confess that we're Christians and to demonstrate what that means by the choices we make and the way we live.

The bottom line is this: we don't have to try to make God's future happen; we don't have to try to be agents of God's hope on our own. Our triune God is at work in and through us to accomplish God's good purposes. To that end, God the Creator made us for fellowship with God and one another; God the Savior makes us alive with hope so we may share in Christ's ministry; and God the Holy Spirit makes us new

creations in Christ that we may be the Church, the agents of hope that the world needs right here, right now.

~Written by Rev. Margie Osborn

[1] 2 Corinthians 5:17

[1] <https://www.c-span.org/classroom/document/?25360>.

[1] William Willimon, *Pulpit Resource*, Vol. 26 No. 4, October, November, December 1998, 28.

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