

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Sunday – August 20, 2017 – Worship in the Garden
Hollywood Lutheran * ADORE * Mt. Hollywood UCC
Joseph Castañeda-Carrera and Anne G. Cohen, Ministers

Isaiah 58: 9-12

Garden Reflections

3rd Isaiah, written 2500 years ago, was directed at the remnant. These folks had finally returned from the Babylonian Exile and were rebuilding the destroyed Temple along with their homes – all leveled by the invading Babylonians. But, apparently, these returnees were feeling sorry for themselves – more interested in complaining about what they had lost and accusing each other of personal violations – than celebrating their rebirth as a community and nation.

So, Isaiah pointed out that if they take care of each other, do justice, meet the needs of the least among them – show some CHUTZPAH – then G-d would do the same for them. G-d is reciprocal like that.

If these whiny people would shape up and live compassionate lives, they would reap what they sow. This remnant of returnees was a sack of seeds, planting the future – and it needed to be a future worthy of the claim of being G-d's people.

But people tend to complain and bicker because they are tired, they are afraid and beaten down – and because they are human. So, Isaiah offered hope along with the chastisement. G-d will make you strong and turn this sorry sack of seeds into an oasis in the desert. You will succeed in your project here and you will earn titles like “Repairer of Broken Walls” and “Restorer of Streets with Dwellings” – rather than “Complainer-in-Chief” or “Heartless Tweeter of Meanness.”

So, we gather here in this garden-to-be, envisioning its oasis potential – growing food for the community, establishing a labyrinth for meditation, reclaiming a place of neglect and marking this land for drought-resistant beauty. It is a metaphor for the work we do every day out in the world – teaching, creating, helping others, shoring up the foundations of the Common Good – work that will never cease to be available to us.

These days it's easy to feel like our efforts just aren't worth it. The KKK and the Nazi's have reappeared in our streets like a cancer out of remission. Black and Brown lives continue to be devalued and snuffed – as if Jim Crow never died. Some Whites continue to use our privilege as a weapon – while others of us complain and bicker and snipe at each other for failing to be perfect allies to racial and economic justice, for

neglecting our responsibility for maintaining the Common Good, for not doing ENOUGH – fast enough.

But just stop. And look around you. Look at this gathering of humans– one congregation scooped up out of the sea of Los Angeles to find G-d around the table and on the local hiking trails – two more congregations aware of their 100-year histories and struggling to shed our feelings of “remnant-ness” – to find a way into the future with some amount of grace.

Look at this garden, slowly resurrecting itself after a period of neglect. Look at that patch of mulch over there – that is the result of two people bringing two barrels of free mulch from L.A. County every morning for 10 days. Every barrel bringing us closer to the vision. Two people, two barrels, every morning. That’s what it’s about.

When I feel like my tiny efforts aren’t really worth it (usually when I’m tired or congress has passed more legislative horror) – I find someone to remind me that the Kin-dom of G-d is not a new world order. It is a fleeting thing created or found around a table or on a trail or in a garden or a sanctuary or a relationship. The Beloved Community isn’t a global manifestation of World Peace and Economic Justice and Environmental Salvation. It is a Way of Life – one loaf of bread broken at a time – two barrels of mulch delivered each morning – one solar station built each month – a march or counter-demonstration in Boston or L.A. every once-in-a-while.

My Dad was at a meeting in the 1970’s with Daniel Ellsberg – military analyst and activist known for releasing the Pentagon Papers. And Ellsberg reminded those present that they were in it for the long haul. In other words, activism isn’t a phase or a project with an end in sight; it is a way of life.

So, as we look at ourselves and one another, what are some ways that we are already repairing breaches? Restoring gardens and city streets?

What are some things we might do together to create Beloved Community – however temporary – but sorely needed?

Isaiah 58: 9-12

“If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,
10
and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the noonday.

11
The Lord will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.

**You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.**

12
Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins
and will raise up the age-old foundations;
**you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.**

Daniel Ellsberg
Born April 7, 1931 (age 86)
Chicago, Illinois, U.S.
Education Harvard University (PhD)
King's College, Cambridge
Employer RAND Corporation
Known for Pentagon Papers,

Daniel Ellsberg (born April 7, 1931) is an American activist and former United States military analyst who, while employed by the RAND Corporation, precipitated a national political controversy in 1971 when he released the Pentagon Papers, a top-secret Pentagon study of U.S. government decision-making in relation to the Vietnam War, to The New York Times and other newspapers.

Ellsberg was charged under the Espionage Act of 1917 along with other charges of theft and conspiracy, carrying a total maximum sentence of 115 years. Due to governmental misconduct and illegal evidence gathering, and the defense by Leonard Boudin and Harvard Law School professor Charles Nesson, Judge William Matthew Byrne Jr. dismissed all charges against Ellsberg on May 11, 1973.

Ellsberg was awarded the Right Livelihood Award in 2006. He is also known for having formulated an important example in decision theory, the Ellsberg paradox and for having voiced support for Wikileaks, Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Ellsberg