

Sermon Note: Celebration

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost

Introduction

This Sunday we continue our series, **The Days are Surely Coming** with *Celebration*. In our reading this week, Isaiah sketches joy that is more than a mood: it is a community where tears are quieted, houses are built and lived in, gardens feed their planters, children start strong, and elders finish well. This is celebration that carries significance—tied to workbenches and dinner tables, neighborhoods and long-term commitments. It is celebration that acknowledges pain, and trusts that God is bringing new creation into our ordinary spaces. We will explore how joy becomes a shared practice—grounded, communal, and sustained—so that gratitude might shape how we live in the present.

Illustration Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SeDoP4ILwjg>

In *Akeelah and the Bee* (2006), the audience eagerly awaits the final round of the Scripps National Spelling Bee with two finalists remaining.

Why This Video?

In the final sequence of *Akeelah and the Bee* (2006), Dylan and Akeelah successfully spell their final championship words—and the audience erupts in joy. The applause highlights the collective work of families, coaches, and neighbors that made this moment possible—hours of practice, steady support, shared resolve. This is a celebration that is public and shared, grounded in formation and community, and that sends people back to ordinary life with courage.

Video Discussion Questions

1. The emcee announces “final two championship words” and that “one or both” could win. How does that frame your expectations for the end of the bee?
2. When Dylan is congratulated as a champion and the judge immediately asks everyone to be seated for Akeelah’s turn, how does that shift affect the people in the room?
3. In this shift, what changes first—sound, movement, or expressions—and what do those changes suggest?
4. As Akeelah steps to the mic, what shifts in her demeanor or the crowd’s posture stand out to you?
5. With Akeelah’s word (“pulchritude”), she states the derivation and meaning and the judges confirm. What does that reveal about her preparation and confidence?
6. After Akeelah is congratulated, whose reactions do you notice first—family, coaches, classmates—and what do they communicate?
7. In the closing voiceover, Akeelah says there is a word for the feeling and spells “L-O-V-E.” What do you think she means by “love” in this moment, given her mentions of family, coaches, and neighborhood?
8. If our congregation wanted celebration to look like this in ordinary life, what is one concrete habit we could practice this week?

Isaiah 65:17-25 (NRSVue)

¹⁷For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.

¹⁸But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I am creating,
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy
and its people as a delight.

¹⁹I will rejoice in Jerusalem
and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it
or the cry of distress.

²⁰No more shall there be in it
an infant who lives but a few days
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime,
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.

²¹They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

²²They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat,
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

²³They shall not labor in vain
or bear children for calamity,
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—
and their descendants as well.

²⁴Before they call I will answer,
while they are yet speaking I will hear.

²⁵The wolf and the lamb shall feed together;
the lion shall eat straw like the ox,
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!

They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain,
says the Lord.

Scripture Study Questions

1. The Israelites had long languished as unwilling “guests”—an oppressed and conquered people—in foreign lands. They despaired of their future as a nation and a people, yet life went on. Then, the word of Isaiah proclaimed that God was about to do a radical new thing. Re-read the passage and draw a verbal picture of what Isaiah says was coming. What does this “new heavens and new earth” look like?

2. As you look at these extravagant promises of restoration, do you believe it is possible in your lifetime? Is it possible ever? What makes you believe as you do? What signs do you see that its fruition is possible (or not)? What would have to change, and how might that be accomplished?
3. In a time socially, religiously, and politically where there is so much polarization, do you yearn for a time when “wolf and lamb shall feed together”? What are you prepared to do, change, or give up so that such a time could happen?
4. There is an eschatological sense to this passage; if peace, prosperity, and unity are not possible in the kingdom on earth, it will be accomplished in the kingdom to come. How would you recognize God’s activity to bring this about? What signs tell you that God’s hoped-for kingdom is unfolding?
5. In any case, the prophet reminds his community that there is cause for rejoicing, even when life is difficult and certainly less than ideal. What brings you joy at this time? Where and when can you truly rejoice? How do you try to multiply that joy?

Additional (Optional) Questions

1. Isaiah offers a vision of a transformed world. Look back over the scripture and notice some of the different parts of the world that he says God will ultimately transform into something better. Write them in a list. Look at the list and think about the reality of our world today. What is the problem in each of those areas currently? You can think locally and globally.
2. Why do you think the promised transformation hasn’t happened yet?
3. Take the list you made and pray about one thing you could do as to help bring about the transformation Isaiah envisioned. Then, talk with a friend, family member, or trusted spiritual partner about doing the same as a group.
4. Be specific about which of those things you’d like to try to do this week. Also think about something you can plan for the future.

Weekly Action

Make celebration concrete this week. Choose one good thing that has been built, planted, or begun (a finished task at home, a garden success story, a ministry or discipleship goal reached). Within the next week, gather one or two people who shared in it, say one sentence of thanks to God, and enjoy the “fruit” in a simple way—use it, eat it, or share it (a slice of what you cooked, a photo of a repaired space, a short note of gratitude). If the good belongs to someone else, honor their work with a brief message and a small treat.

Prayer

God of all Creation, you have in mind a vision of and a task for your ideal heavens and earth. Help us to see that vision clearly, to embrace the tasks we are given to bring it about, and to rejoice in all that you have done for us. Make us truly grateful in our work of discipleship so that we never fear laboring in vain. In all things, we trust you and give you thanks. Amen.