

Perhaps you, like me, wondered years ago what the future would be like. After all, many of us were shaped by Saturday morning cartoons like The Jetsons with flying cars and robots doing housework. You might also remember thinking about the year 2000 as if it were light years away, and wondering, when the year 2000 arrived, where the flying cars were.

Visions of the future also tended to be very optimistic. For example, the 1939 New York World's Fair promised a glimpse into "the world of tomorrow," with futuristic exhibits and electronic gadgetry -- the underlying text being the promise of a brighter, more efficient, and more prosperous life in the decades to come. In a similar vein, the 1962 World's Fair in Seattle brought us the Space Needle, and, not ~~surprisingly~~ surprisingly, technology played a major role in the optimistic vision of the future.

And, not to overlook the obvious, the TV series (and subsequent franchise) Star Trek took us all the way into the twenty-third century, and offered not only technologically-related visions of the future, but also visions of racial and gender equality, which were just getting their start some fifty years ago.

Christians, as a whole, have not been entirely consistent in their estimations of the future. Many have been very gloomy, in fact, as we can look to books such as The Late Great Planet Earth and see global tumult and catastrophes presented as evidence for the imminent End Times. And, of course, when the End Times come, only those who are saved will

be spared the hardships and disasters retold to something called The Great Tribulation. Then finally, Christ will come, the world will end, and, presumably, a whole bunch of people will be damned to hell. If this is something you're not very familiar with, don't fear. . . growing up Lutheran, I didn't know anything about this because it was never taught, and lifelong Episcopalians would be the same in this regard. It wasn't until I encountered hard-core evangelical Christians that I had heard anything of the sort.

While mainline Christians tend to view the visions of the End Times of their evangelical counterparts as rather bizarre, it doesn't mean that Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Congregationalists don't think about the End Times. In fact, we would acknowledge that Christianity, indeed, has an orientation toward the future. However, we do not view the Bible as a book of clues to be deciphered so as to pinpoint exactly how the End Times will unfold. Often, what some Christians identify as "clues" may simply be poetic imagery and ~~no~~ no more.

This morning's Gospel text contains references to "the kingdom of God" (Luke 10:9, 11), and this is a future reality brought into the present. Christianity often does this to us; as an example, the Eucharist in which we will share shortly is "a foretaste of the feast to come," with the future heavenly feast in the kingdom of God breaking into our reality on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July, 2022.

But this is a glorious future, not a gloomy one. Similarly, when Jesus appointed the seventy, he ordered them to proclaim the future come into the present. He says, "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!'" (Luke 10:5). Now, this is not merely a peace that we'd associate with calm or absence of conflict; instead, it's likely more all-encompassing like the Hebrew concept of shalom. It's a heavenly peace -- one that is personal as well as political and spiritual as well as social. It's the peace of the kingdom of God, but a future peace brought into the present.

So why would this be a priority for proclamation? In its context, Luke, chapter 10 reflects the stresses and uncertainties of an occupied region; thus, the hope of a peaceful future is an obvious priority. But if the kingdom of God is really on its way, it's imperative that there be ~~the kingdom's~~ peace (or at least an approximation thereof) as a seed bed for the kingdom's peace. If no one can recognize peace at all, what good would God's peace be?

Yet we still encounter the reality that the kingdom of God was much "nearer" in the minds of early Christians, including the audience of the Gospel of Luke. And here we are, two thousand years later, still hearing the promise, "The kingdom of God has come near." Does this mean that we're clinging to an empty hope? Certainly, with all the shootings and the war in Ukraine and the civil unrest here and elsewhere, it's mighty easy to get discouraged. We can practice and promote peace all we want,

but the world won't listen. Then we hear Jesus' orders: "Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves" (Luke 10:3). Yes, the world will probably be a hostile and cruel place for a long, long time, and we, the lambs, will have to face the wolves for the remainder of our earthly lives.

But God's future won't be the same as the world's future. Sure, a World's Fair can show us a life made perfect through ~~tech~~ technology, but we know that's not possible. The only perfect life is the life of the world to come, which is foreshadowed in declarations like "Peace to this house" and "The kingdom of God has come near." We probably won't get to see the whole world experience the peace of God's kingdom, but, as children of God, we'll always have this peace in our hearts and minds and in every gathering like this where we receive "a foretaste of the feast to come." And as we go forth from this place -- perhaps like lambs into the midst of wolves -- we have a peace that is not what the world gives, but is instead what Jesus gives. That's the heavenly peace -- one that we can experience now only partially -- and it's personal as well as political and spiritual as well as social.

But you'll know it when you experience it!

Speaking personally, there are occasions when this peace overcomes me, with the celebration of the Eucharist being one of them. I know that the Church on earth joins with the hosts of heaven -- which includes all

my beloved saints now assembled at the feet of the Lord -- every time we lift our voices with "Holy, holy, holy." And in that moment, I am in the midst of an inexplicable heavenly peace. This is, after all, the moment when the future breaks into the present, and where heaven comes to earth.

I also find something similar in my interactions with other people. Jesus says in our text, "And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person..." (Luke 10:6a). Applying this, I take it to mean that another person's peace in heart and mind will allow the peace that I bring to be upon them. Not surprisingly, peaceful people tend to bring the peace out in me. I'm guessing many of you find this to be the case, as well. In a similar vein, the "passing of the peace" in the celebration of the Eucharist is a place where that all-encompassing, heavenly shalom is to spread throughout the congregation to pave the way for the peace that is about to come. Where there is peace between people -- and it is not one-sided -- peace will prevail over all.

Is it only temporary, though? Will it come only in bursts and flashes? Yes, but you can have heavenly peace in your heart and mind any time you want it and as long as you want it. Simply call upon the Lord who announced the peace of the kingdom millennia ago, and his peace from the world to come will be

with you now. And the best future comes not in the promises of a World's Fair, of technology, or of popular culture; rather, it comes straight from the kingdom itself. From there, we can be so ruled in our hearts and minds to make our present reality a glimpse of the world to come. Even in the midst of hopelessness, in this we always have hope.

Amen.