

When King Solomon (in all his glory) built the temple—he had more than 47,000 workers. When the people of Jews were finally released from exile in Babylon and returned their old city of Jerusalem—they wanted to rebuild everything exactly as it was. Except that now, the entire population of this once great city was only about 20,000. There was absolutely no way that they could ever rebuild the temple to its former glory.

But today we hear from a prophet, known only as “Third Isaiah,” who announces to the people that the only reason they are despairing, is because they are looking at reality the wrong way. Things don’t have to remain forever the same – same glory, same grandeur, same structures for things to be considered wonderful.

In fact, --in *reality*-- a new “New Jerusalem” is about to emerge. The old one was bricks and mortar, but the new one would be in their hearts.

The old Jerusalem may have had the buildings, but the new Jerusalem would have the *heart*.

New NEW Jerusalem, he said, “will be an almost mythical place where there will be no crying; a place where one hundred will be considered young. And in this place, mortal enemies will live together in peace (Isaiah 11:6-9).

The key verb form that sets the pace for this passage occurs only in Second Isaiah, with echoes in Third Isaiah (Isa. 40:28; 42:5; 43:15, 18; 57:19; 65:17, 18). The verb is *bara*, which we encounter for the first time in Genesis 1, is connected to God’s unique work of creation. The form here is a participle, whose predominant use is to connote a continuing action. So the JPS

translates this, “I am creating.” However, the same form can indicate imminent action. Hence the NRSV uses the phrase “I am about to create.” The task of the preacher would not necessarily be to decide in favor of one or the other of these two functions, but to play into the question of whether this creation is continuing action or imminent action.^[2] Is God about to act, getting ready to act, or is God actively acting right now?

“I just want this place to go on until I die so I can be buried out of here.”

Is there a future for the church with so many churches aging? It is true that we need people of all ages—because each age teaches us things the others cannot.

But there are many churches here in Maine that have only a small number of aging people in them.

Should we give up on them? Call it a day? Think that – as Sarah did – that since she was elderly and – as she put it—dried up—her life was over. And what happened? God told her she would soon give birth. And she laughed. She didn’t believe it was possible.

A person wanting to be a minister, but she’s 69. People were asking her what her ministry would be: “Encouraging people my age and much older to explore new ways of doing ministry in the church and the world. Our elders have a huge braintrust of experiences and suggestions. There are always new things to learn, and I would encourage them to do so. Imagine what would happen if our elders were encouraged to think about what is

needed in their community or world, and their age is not a limit. I
imagine they would give birth to as yet unimagined things.

Just like Sarah.