

November 13th, 2022 • Charge Conference Sunday • In-Person and Online Worship**“Finding Life, Giving Life”**

Sermon by Rev. Patricia Farris

*Isaiah 65:17-25*

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But 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. I 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. No more shall there be in it an infant that 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. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They 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. They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—and their descendants as well. Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. The 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.

What a beautiful time to worship together and look forward to our annual Charge Conference, which is our Methodist way of saying that we will meet to hold ourselves accountable for the mission and ministry with which God has entrusted us. I hope that you will stay if you are here in person, or join online. I'm only sorry that we haven't yet found a way to make it possible for all you online folks to share in the delicious lunch!

How grateful we can be for this year of life in faith together. For while we have felt the loss of dear congregation members and family, we have experienced through it all the constancy and deep faithfulness that binds us together and holds us in love through it all. Here we find the promise of life, abundant life in this moment, and everlasting life in the future God prepares for us. We find life and we give life to one another, through our prayers, our words of comfort, our expressions of love and care.

As the prophet Isaiah puts it: God says—"I am about to create a new heaven and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But 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. I 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...Like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands..."

Finding Life—Giving Life.

We are continuing to receive new members—a few more next Sunday, so you won't want to miss that! And you know what, these new folks keep saying how glad they are to be here, how grateful they are to have found a new home in this congregation. Even as they're getting to know people and learning how to get more involved, they're excited. They feel something move in their heart, in their soul. They are finding life in the depth and peace of worship, in the beauty of music, in prayer with and for one another, in the study of God's Word, in fellowship with new friends, in care for one another.

Isaiah tells us that God assures us: "Before they call, I will answer, while they are yet speaking, I will hear." The Spirit of God is in this place, in this community of faith, hearing us, answering us, always opening opportunities for new life, deeper life, richer life, life in the Kingdom of God.

Finding Life—Giving Life. And they're equally excited to learn about all the many ways this congregation is in mission, in our community and around the world. They're asking to know how to get involved. You know, in this time we live in, we know that people long to belong to something that feels like it's making the world a better place. People sense that here.

So, together we're already imagining new mission trips, expanded support of our mission partners, hands-on, face-to-face relationship with the people we serve.

In this time of change and new growth at First UMC, we are living into abundant life in Christ Jesus. Led by the Holy Spirit, we are learning together how to become a Both/And Church, in-person AND online. We are finding life in worship, prayer, fellowship, and service. We are giving life to one another and to those around us in mission outreach with our many community partners. And in this pandemic/endemic time in which we now live, we've done things in new ways that we want to continue—our in-person/online worship, online study groups in which anyone can participate, ZOOM evening meetings which are so great for parents, folks not wanting to drive at night, and a whole host of others, bringing flowers to people who need to stay home, meeting up for walks and in parks and for coffee, having a chance for people to stop, start, and change what they're involved with, making it possible for groups to stop doing some things and to do other things in new ways...

As we write a new chapter in the 147+ year life of First UMC, we know that changing times demand new approaches and new commitments. Our financial foundation still requires extraordinarily generous giving from each and all of us.

Your participation is now more important than ever. Having lost several long-time members this year, and experiencing reduced revenue from outside groups, this is a critical season. As you heard from Kim, our Finance Committee is asking us all to step up in new ways.

Bring your pledge card to offer in worship next Sunday or mail to the church office. You may also learn more about financial pledge support for FUMC on our webpage.

Jesus said: "I have come that you may have life—and have it more abundantly!" (John 10:10)

The abundant life we find in Christ Jesus is a miraculous gift of God's generosity and grace. Through the gift of the Church, we experience it in a multitude of ways. And through the outreach and mission of the church, we rejoice to share it with sisters and brothers near and far.

Finding Life—Giving Life. In the words of the hymn, we proclaim: "This is my story, this is my song." There is so much for which to give thanks in this season, and much to plan and create together in the faithful, expansive, hope-filled life that is First UMC Santa Monica. For our God says: "I am about to create a new heaven and a new earth...be glad and rejoice forever!"

Thanks to all of you! And thanks be to God!

AMEN