Let’s start out today with a very serious question. What did the past say to the future? I have a present for you.

In all seriousness. What are our hopes for the future? How do we envision the world to come? Do you find yourself so mired down from the experiences of the past that the present doesn’t allow you to hope for a better future? If I’m honest, I’ve had those exact times of hopelessness. In times like these I know where to turn to…kids!

[Show Video]

Now back to that present from the past to the future. Today we will take a look at a present from the prophet Isaiah about new heavens and a new earth. As I read this passage in preparing for this message, I was reminded of a conversation I had with a clergy friend.

She went to a conference that she really enjoyed. She told me all about it, especially the three major speakers. "One of the speakers," she said, "teaches Bible at Iliff Seminary. She really knew her stuff. She presented all of the currents of biblical research. She also shared the recent and not so recent past in biblical studies."

"The second speaker was a theologian. This speaker did pretty much the same as the biblical teacher. He reminded us of our Wesleyan heritage. He talked about the giants of theology in the early 20th century. Giants like Karl Barth, Thomas Merton, and Dietrich Bonehoffer. He finished by outlining the major streams of theology that place us where we are today.

And then, my friend got excited as she started talking about the third speaker. This speaker was an incredibly gifted lay woman, working in the field of applied science. She was a member of a United Methodist Church and a graduate from a United Methodist college. Her presentation on the nature of science today was mind-blowing. She described it as a field that is changing with incredible speed. The average length of time of a job in her field is three years. The average length of time of a company in the field is seven years. On the one hand, she said, that is scary.

On the other hand, she said, this is probably the most exciting time to be alive as a human. Things are changing. These changes are bringing with them grand new opportunities. It makes me believe that we can change our future for the better!"

After describing the speakers, she had this to say. You know something, I found this interesting. You see the church's teachers, that professor and theologian. They mostly talked to us about the past. The science speaker talked mostly about the future. But that isn't even the most interesting part. Because she not only talked about the future, she made it clear that science has moved far beyond the point of thinking that God can be factored out of any intelligent equation. (Repeat) As we move to this new future, spiritual issues would absolutely be of vital concern. And you have the answers here, she said to us clergy. We look to you. We need you to help us provide the spiritual food the world needs as we move toward a new tomorrow."

My friend dropped the mic with the last part of her story. She had a chance to visit with this scientist before she left. In their conversation, the scientist had this to say about her observations from the last few days. I'm very impressed with all of you. You are wonderful leaders,' she told me. 'As a group you are incredibly bright and talented. I've never heard any group so knowledgeable about the issues you were discussing. I am truly thankful that our church has such dedicated leaders. But did you realize that everything you talked about is in the past. It's the past that you are so knowledgeable of. You are experts in discussing the past. But I can't recall hearing anyone discuss the future. Where your church is going in this exciting time. The kind of future you are going to create. Doesn't the church have language to talk about the future? Doesn't the Bible have anything to give a vision of hope for a new world?

To that last question I'm pleased to say, yes as a matter of fact it does. We will find a perfect example of that in our passage today from Isaiah, where we are given a beautiful vision of the future. It is a message overflowing with joy and hope and peace. It's a vision of a future that should not be dreaded or feared. On the contrary, it is a future that is something to get excited about. Because this beautiful future is not by our doing. It's a future that will happen because of what God is doing. God is going to act in a wonderful and surprising way, because God is going

to create a new heavens, a new earth and a new Jerusalem. God is going to take great joy in this new creation, and the people too are going to be full of joy and celebrate God's new creation. Isaiah goes on to describe what this new creation will like: No more weeping. No more crying. No more tragic deaths of babies. No more premature deaths of adults. We will enjoy building and living in our houses—no more homeless people. People will eat fruit from vineyards they've planted. They will enjoy the work of their hands. There will be no more hungry people. God will bless people of all ages. In fact, prayers will be answered even before people finish praying them. It will be a society with perfect equality, perfect freedom, and perfect justice. Peace will prevail. The whole created order of nature will change. Enemies will become friends—wolves and lambs, lions and oxen, even serpents will live in perfect harmony and peace.

An early Protestant reformer said this about Isaiah 65. "Through his Gospel God can make the supreme tyrants of the world subject to a simple man and preacher, even though these tyrants were lions and wolves. God can turn enemies into friends. They shall feed together ... The kingdom of peace follows. They shall not hurt. The sum of everything: There must be a reign of peace among themselves. There will be peace without sword or force or tyranny, because there will be love, they will have the same inheritance, and everything will be the common possession of friends.

Isn't that a beautiful vision of a future bursting with perfect peace? This vision of the future is what the New Testament writers describe too, as they point to the saving work of Jesus Christ on the cross and God's mighty act of raising him from the dead three days later. The resurrection of Christ, which we joyfully celebrate at Easter, is God's sign to us that such a future of perfect peace is possible. One day, we too shall share in a resurrection like Christ's and live with him in perfect peace.

Until then, we are blessed with small glimpses of that future whenever Christ's love and peace shine in us and through us. I see it every week when I go to Preschool Chapel. Whatever their everyday lives are. Whatever their lived experience of church is. For a few precious moments

every Wednesday at 10 these kids get to experience the joy of the Lord. If anything could mimick a glimpse of the new heavens, I am certain Preschool chapel could.

In Jesus, our Prince of Peace, we look forward to that future time; the day of that Peaceable Kingdome. That day of our own resurrection; when all violence, hatred, sin, death and evil shall end; when, as the prophet so beautiful describes it: “They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the LORD.” Let us pray.