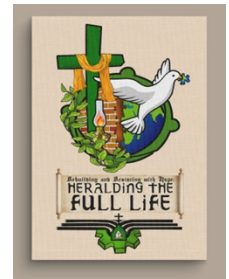




74th Church Anniversary Celebration

May 25, 2022



THE CELEBRATION OF FAITH AND WITNESS

...the body of Christ gathers...

Music Prelude

Processional

The Lighting of Christ Candle

... welcoming and greeting as kins...

Greetings

Fellowship Song

“Song of Joy”

**Come on everybody, sing a song of joy
Let everybody listen to the happy sound.
Come on, everybody, sing a song of joy
Let everybody hear the world around
Joy is like a sunshine,
Joy is like the rain.**

Community and Church Concerns

...to praise God...

Introit

Call to Praise

Minister: Praise to God for the gifts of the past,
For the witness of the people of God, who went before us.

People (singing)

“O God of Vision”

Jane Parker Huber, 1981

***O God of vision far greater than all human scheming,
Gather us now in your presence, refreshing, redeeming,
Show us anew, life in Your breathtaking view,
Lovely beyond all sour dreaming.***

liturgist: Praise to God for the gifts of the present,
For the strength to act and voice to speak the truth,
In all our struggles to be true to Christ.

people (singing) ***Pour out your Spirit on all now assembled before You
May our diversity here be a means to adore you
Women and men, young, old and youthful again,
Make us as one, we implore you.***

liturgist: Praise to God for the gifts in the future,
For visions made clear, for goals draw near
In the Spirit, we are led into God's mission.

people (singing) ***"Grateful, we come now by Christ's invitation, clear spoken
We seek the nourishment found in fruit crushed and bread broken
Christ for us all! come let us answer the call
Offering our lives as a token.***

...to celebrate our story and identity...

Video Presentation/ Glimpses of the Church's Journey

...affirm God's gift of unity ...

Hymn of Affirmation

"Work in Your Kingdom" HFJ,302

Work in your kingdom advances and continues,
Even through hard times, all odds and tribulations,
Despite our human infirmities and weakness,
Use us O Savior, till the task is done.

There is no service impossible to render,
If we but trust in your strength and in your power,
Make us, O God, to be diligent and zealous
Until your full will here on earth be done.

Lord, all our time we now offer in your service,
All the resources to us you have entrusted,
Use all our knowledge, our intellect and wisdom,
Our enthusiasm, strength and might, O God.

All of our talents which are your gifts from heaven,
We would be careful to use these as intended,
So that your kingdom be built up and exalted,
O God our Parent, source of love and light.

Prayer of Affirmation (all)

We come to you, O Lord, today as a community mindful of and thankful for a very historic event we are observing today. Indeed, we remember today the days when our church, the UCCP was established out of the longings and desire of the several member churches when, the Philippine Methodist Church, the United Evangelical Church, the Evangelical Church in the Philippines, and later on, the Disciples Church to become one. We thank you O Lord, for making us part of the continuing stream of generations of Christians in this country who long for unity and who try to work out your mission in the spirit of being one body. We thank you for this church, the UCCP, a gift of your grace to our people, an instrument for the proclamation of and witnessing to your prophetic word to the four corners of this country. We thank you for the gift of faithful believers in this church who continue to stand up for your truth and for your gospel even in the most difficult of times these days. We thank you for her founding leaders, officials and all her clergy and lay workers, who in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds, continued with unceasing zeal the pioneering task of organizing, nurturing and empowering the churches for discipleship and mission among our people.

We ask for your divine forgiveness and mercy as we look back at this history of ours. A history marked by both strength and weaknesses, but a history we know can always be redeemed by your grace. As we journey forward, we continue to affirm our being a **united and uniting** church; for bearing the character as **evangelical and evangelistic**; doing our **ministry that is wholistic**; whose **concerns are universal and inclusive**; responsive to the call of times with a **spirit that is progressive** and an **attitude that is open-minded**. May you continue to bless and empower all the efforts of our church to remain faithful to your mandate in the great commission even in her many imperfect ways. May you find us persevering still even in the midst of the various historical ambiguities we find ourselves in. This we pray, O Lord in the name of our Savior, Redeemer and Friend Jesus Christ who is the Head of this Church. Amen.

...and hear God's Word...

Scripture Reading

Choral Anthem

Reflection on the Celebration of the 74th Anniversary

...to respond with faith and thanksgiving...

Call to Offering

Minister: We who are gathered know the love of God that is given freely and abundantly to the world. God has taught us that to love is to give freely and abundantly, not because we must, but because we believe. Let us offer to God our lives and our gifts.

Offering of Thanksgiving for the 74th UCCP Anniversary

Song Offering

Doxology "Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow" HFJ#94

Words: Thomas Ken, 1674; alt.

Music: Louis Bourgeois, 1551

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow

Praise God, all creatures here below;

Praise God, the Spirit, Holy Flame;

All glory, honor to God's Name. Amen

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Minister

Declaration of Faith

UCCP STATEMENT OF FAITH

WE BELIEVE in One God: Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer who provides order, purpose, meaning and fulfillment to all creation.

That in Jesus Christ, who was born of Mary, God became human and is Sovereign Lord of life and history.

That in the Holy Spirit, God is present in the world. Empowering and guiding believers to understand and live out their faith in Jesus Christ.

WE BELIEVE persons are created in the image of God and destined to live in community with God, with other persons and with all creation.

That by disobedience, they have become sinful, but, by grace through faith, they are redeemed in Jesus Christ.

That being entrusted with God's creation, they are called to participate in the establishment of a just and compassionate social order.

WE BELIEVE that the Church is the one Body of Christ, the whole community of persons reconciled to God through Jesus Christ and entrusted with God's ministry.

WE BELIEVE that the Holy Bible is a faithful and inspired witness of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ and in history, to illumine, guide and correct and edify believers in their faith and witness.

WE BELIEVE that God is at work to make each person a new being in Christ and the whole world, God's Kingdom in which love, justice and peace prevail. That the Kingdom of God is present where faith in Jesus Christ is shared, where healing is given to the sick, where food is given to the hungry, where light is given to the blind, and where liberty is given to the captive and oppressed.

WE BELIEVE that the resurrection of Jesus Christ has overcome the power of death, gives assurance of life after death, and we look forward to His coming again in all fullness and glory to make all creation new and to gather all the faithful in the Kingdom of God.

...and go out with God's blessings...

Hymn of Challenge

"Onward Christian People"

(Tune: Onward Christian Soldiers, The Hymnbook, 350)

Sabine Baring-Gould, 1864

Arthur S. Sullivan, 1871

*Onward, Christian people, let us rise and go,
Bearers of the Gospel, where there's human woe
Not in cross-topped tower, lifting to the sky
But among the needy, saying, "Here am I"*

Refrain: Here's my hand co-workers, give me your hand too;

Let us work together, there is much to do.

*There are many strongholds, firm as Jericho
Wall that must be shaken, let the trumpets blow
There is much oppression, there is poverty
If we march together, we'll win victory!*

*In our global village, all must kindred be,
It's not good just talking - that's hypocrisy,
Join the faith with action, put your hand in, too
Grant us, God, the vision of a world made new!*

*Onward, sisters, brothers, go into the streets
There are lonely people you will surely meet*

All the sad and broken, longing for love's touch

Let us take God's presence, who said, "I'm as much

Closing Prayer

Elder/Minister

Blessings

Minister

Minister: Bless the church, O Lord, and the people comprising her with all their hopes and all their dreams, and with all their struggles for wholeness and restoration to herald the full life.

*All: Bless your people, O Lord with your breathe. Like the dried bones, may we all rise up and witness your Reign to the world.
Amen*

Response

"Masithi Amen"

Sudafrika

Masithi Amen, siyakudumisa

Masithi Amen, siyakudumisa

Masithi Amen Bawo, Amen Bawo,

Amen, siyakudumisa.

Sing Amen! Amen, we praise your name, O God

Sing Amen! Amen, we praise your name, O God

Sing Amen! Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen,

Amen, we praise your name O God!

Postlude

REBUILDING AND RESTORING WITH HOPE: HERALDING THE FULL LIFE
A Biblico-Theological Reflection for UCCP 74th Anniversary and the 12th General Assembly
May 23-26, 2022, Malate Manila

Scripture Text: Ezekiel 37: 1-14

Prepared by Ferdinand Anno, Ph.D.

REBUILDING AND RESTORATION are visions, hopes, and actions towards the realization of the vision of the full life. The full life means many things to the Scriptures. It is not unrelated to the social vision of *shalom*¹ that you can find in the Old Testament, or to the gospel of the reign of God as proclaimed in the New Testament, or even the reconciled life in the Pastoral Letters. We can safely say that the gospel of the faith is the full life which we can experience in part or as a foretaste when God reigns in us, in our world, and creation. The scriptures also affirm that the full life was seen in the person of Jesus Christ and his work (John 10:10) and, thus, something that was a reality in the passion, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

RESTORATION AND REBUILDING presupposes an experience of fragmentation and destruction. This narrative abounds in the Scriptures from the time of the fall (Gen 3:23) to the abandonment of God's people's covenant relationship with God (Ez 16:59). This separation from God has brought so much devastation in inter-human relations, in history, and to the earth (Romans 8: 22).

The theme's annexing of hope ("WITH HOPE") adds a perspective to the praxis of restoration and rebuilding. Set in their scriptural contexts, restoration and rebuilding are not easy. The fragmentation and the destruction were so thorough that even the concept of "original sin" was thought of in theology, or that going through the eye of the needle (Mt 19: 24) and the "born again" (Jn 3: 1-7) are a requirement of faith, or that we not only "wrestle with flesh and blood but with "powers and principalities (Eph 6:12-18)." To "build and to plant" (Jer 1:10) means you must dig deep into roots of the human crisis, and this would invite resistance if not persecution. Restoring and rebuilding with hope acknowledges this context but at the same time negates this in the faithful's act of radical hoping.

Restoring and rebuilding with hope points to our embracing the promise of the full life and the hope inspired by the full life.² It is this hope that generates our "*gana*" for the full life. *Kapag ginanahan tayo*, the full life that we have embraced would be a reality in the here and now of our radical hoping.

The UCCP may be a little off the grid with its talking past the pandemic and its thematic agenda of "rebuilding and restoration with hope." The pandemic still rages on and there are surges now and then. Yet, it is precisely at this time when we need to muster that prophetic will to announce hope that life can be rebuilt and restored from the "valley of dry bones (Ez 37:1-13). "Hope" to us as a faith community is the transgression of the normalization of life in the valley of dry bones. It is what aligns us to the vision of a fuller life for all. Hope is what could energize us into restoring and rebuilding our lives and institutions in the pandemic-ravaged world.

REBUILDING AND RESTORING WITH HOPE : A proposed textual companion (Ezekiel 37: 1-14)

I propose starting with the messages and visions of the prophet Ezekiel to frame one perspective through which we can expound on our theme for the UCCP quadrennium's inaugural year, "rebuilding and restoring with hope: heralding the full life.

¹While it is normally translated "peace" in English, *Shalom* as conceived in the Scriptures is more about the "full life" where there is contentment, completeness, material and spiritual well-being, wholeness, harmony and complete peace. This will be treated separately in another essay.

²A paraphrase of Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 1967: 16

37 The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ² He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. ³ He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?”

I said, “Sovereign LORD, you alone know.”

⁴ Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! ⁵ This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath^[a] enter you, and you will come to life. ⁶ I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.’”

⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. ⁸ I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

⁹ Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

¹¹ Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ ¹² Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³ Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. ¹⁴ I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.’” (Ez.37: 1-13)

The book as a whole traverses a wide swath of ancient Israel's history, and his messages, both uttered and performed, include an announcement of judgment, an anticipation of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and the announcement of hope and restoration. This reflection focuses on at least three thrusts in the prophetic message using pandemic-era language: (1) the virus of injustice, (2) the virus of idolatry, and (3) the virus of exilic living. The foregoing serves as the context of our exposition on our theme for the first ecclesiastical year of the quadrennium, 2022-26.

THE RESTORED LIFE AND THE BODY-SPIRIT-ECOSYSTEM TRI-UNITY

LIFE is restored when bones and flesh come together. This initial description of the restored life is material or inclusive of the material. It is about our physiological or physical well-being. Nonetheless, the restored life is not “full” in the fullest sense of the word until the divine breath is breathed unto our bones and flesh. The full life is realized when the breath of God comes to us from the “four winds.”

There may be differing usages of “breath” and the “four winds” in the Scriptures but, principally, the “breath” in Ezekiel’s vision can be associated with the primeval creative and life-giving breath of God. The “four winds” on the one hand can be associated with the whole of the earth or heaven.

To put it succinctly, the full life means the restoration of the body and our material well-being, the regeneration of our spiritual and moral life, and the rebuilding of our common life as an ecosystem. These are not necessarily in order as enumerated. The process of restoring and rebuilding can be initiated from any point of the body-spirit-ecosystem tri-unity.

Let us look closely at where our theme is coming from: our global, national, and local communities during this global pandemic, and the calls made by the prophet and their relevance to us in our situation

Before the exile, the prophet Ezekiel has been calling on the people of Israel to abandon their idolatry including the proper observance of the sabbath (Ez. 20). The prophet also denounced how the temple became an accomplice and a sanctuary to idolatrous practices and dispelled the popular idea that God can be worshipped “correctly” only in the temple of Jerusalem (11:23) and, more importantly, from the 37th chapter of the book, the prophet Ezekiel called on the exiled people to keep the faith and their hopes of restoration.

In times such as these, the prophecy of Ezekiel reverberates: God has been denouncing the leaders of Israel as false shepherds of their flock for their inability to care for the poor. What the shepherds of the nation did was live in opulence while the rest of the population live in penury. This was not unassociated with their breaking the statutes of the faith and their idolatry that has invaded even the temple. As far as the prophets of Israel are concerned, and this includes Ezekiel, the two: idolatry and oppression or the absence of justice are one and the same. The plot in the book of the prophet was a story of one viral infection to another: the virus of injustice and idolatry, and the virus of exile.

The non-observance of the sabbath is another. In the world of the prophets of exile, the emphasis on the cosmic or the ecological expanse of the sabbath may be subdued, but the story of the sabbath was already at that time conceived as involving the whole of creation (as was the case of sabbaths in Ancient Near Eastern cultures). This was not abandoned in the idea of the Jewish sabbath but the anthropocentric perspective triumphed to conceal the broader expanse of our earth-friendly Scriptures. It is only in the light of our current experience of ecological injustice, and now “climate emergency,” that we are beginning to re-read the centrality of the ecological concern in the idea of the sabbath. (thanks to our indigenous people’s contribution to our theological enlightenment vis-à-vis the sabbath).

Today, we may hear the prophet Ezekiel taking issue with our non-observance of the sacredness of the idea of the whole creation taking its rest. Either directly or indirectly, the global pandemic, or at least its global spread, has to do with our disturbance of the ecological balance – and this is not unconnected to our idolatry, i.e., our greed and unbridled Babylonian lust for god-like power (Gen 11:1-9).

Likewise, the prophet Ezekiel has prophesied of a God who is bigger than the imaginations of temple keepers and that God can be worshiped anywhere and in any situation. God can be worshiped even in unhallowed spaces and in the direst of situations. Our homes, our neighborhoods, our open spaces can be places of worship. We can still be the covenant people of God outside of the spatial and visible symbols of the *qahal* or the *ekklesia* of God’s people; and that worshipping God and keeping the Lord’s Day as holy wherever we are and in whatever situation are our way of communicating the hope that God is very much a part of what we are going through, sharing in our pain and our everyday struggles.

In keeping with the call of the prophet Ezekiel to be faithful to the covenant, we need to always have that sense of *pag-iakapatid* and *pananagutan sa isat-isa* at all times. This is precisely how we must live our affirmation of the Emmanuel-ness of God: that we need to keep our covenant to do justice, to love kindness, and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8). It is the non-practice of the last three that we experience the pandemic as abysmal chaos. After all the social turmoil that we have gone through, injustice still rocks our society, kindness is nowhere manifested in our institutions and establishments and ways of relating with one another. Under the neo-liberal dispensation and its political superstructures, everyone is in the mad race to become like god.

LIVING IN THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES

In the text, the prophet Ezekiel was prophesying to a nation living or lying lifeless in the valley of dry bones. This is akin to an even much worse biblical description of the Hebrew people’s life of exile in Babylon: an eon of chaos when life was not.

The pandemic has brought the world to a standstill. It has brought so much suffering to the already suffering mass of humanity. Many economies went bankrupt, and this has a domino effect on big and small establishments and industries, livelihoods, and employment leading to so much suffering on all fronts. We saw not only the economic collapse and its

dire consequences but also the rise of prejudices and tensions in the social and political fronts, including the pervasiveness of mental health problems among the quarantined. While these may have been going on long before the pandemic, popular authoritarianism, racism, classism, religious fundamentalism, etc. found increased currency during the contagion. In the Philippines, even our experience of ecological relief during the hard lockdown was very fleeting and very recently greeted with the news that the nine-year-old mining ban was already lifted, and open-pit mining is set to resume. This comes as bad news and terrifying to the ecosystem during this pandemic. Sadly, all these are but the tip of an iceberg. The crisis below among the economically displaced families and communities is much worse and sickening to describe. This, the human rights problems that stay unaddressed, the terrorism that comes with the state's continuing fixation with national security, the revision of history to fit into the narrative of repression, and the dimming of the political horizon places us in a dystopian state aptly described by biblical visionaries like the prophet Ezekiel: the valley of dry bones.

There may be many creative entrepreneurial minds doing well, and some sections of the economy have shown not only resilience but also thrived in the new normal; however, these signs are minuscule compared to the devastation brought by the ongoing crises in the bigger section of the global population. The social projection of the present being named "new normal" is not of much help either as this only confirms in people's minds that there would not be any social reordering happening soon; and that the difficult life before the pandemic is set to return in the new technopolis.

Down under, among people who need God the most [what the UCCP names as the *masa*] and they constitute more than half of the social pyramid, life stays helpless, hopeless, and life-less like the dry bones in the valley of death.

RESTORING WITH HOPE: BEYOND THE NEW NORMAL

To "heal as one" requires us not only to ensure that the "new normal" is not a return or a continuation of what was normal before the pandemic. What was normal before the pandemic was the more virulent social virus that is akin to the social virus that afflicted the people of Israel before the exile. The prophet Ezekiel named several variants of the virus like "idolatry." Social critics also call this idolatrous situation a "social cancer," an illness, an affliction not unlike the pandemic of today. The rise of political authoritarianism alongside the pandemic has been redefining the "new normal" into a lethal mix of health and social emergencies.

What the prophet Ezekiel envisioned was not a return to the infected life of the pre-exilic community of God's people. This is how we need to understand the vision of the prophet if we wish to own his vision and hope. The vision was not the rise of the zombies or humanoids but about the masses and their restoration to savor the taste of the full life.

Getting flesh and bone come together points to social change and spiritual rejuvenation. In our social situation, it means the lifting of the poor to reclaim the image of God in themselves, and a new lease of a more dignified life to those uncared for by the "shepherds of Israel ... who have ruled with power and without pity" (Ez 34:1-4).

The UCCP participates in this ministry of healing by heralding a gospel that transcends the social imagination of the "new normal." This new ecclesiastical year is an occasion for the church to expose the sins of what our society and our global community have considered "normal" and the intent to perpetuate this situation under the guise of the "new normal."

THE BREATH AND THE FOUR WINDS: The convergence of divinity and ecology

There is more to the restored life than just bones and flesh coming together. Life is not just existing, breathing, and walking around, or it is not simply about social reversal that emancipates the masses into living a free and decent life. There is the requirement of living in accord with the divine design, and this is supposed to be the message of Christianity. Christianity is not about the perfection of our moral lives and temple-keeping chore. Neither is it solely the rebuilding of the human community.

Centered in the gospel of God's sovereignty over the whole of life, the whole Bible expounds on this requirement. How are we faring as members of the earth community? Do we keep holy the sabbath? for all creation to take its rest? The prophet Ezekiel has been emphatic on the observance of the sabbath. Appropriated in the context of climate emergency in our time, we need to talk about the non-anthropocentric understanding of the sabbath, Sabbath is not solely about us and God. The Sabbath is about God and the eco-system or ecological balance, named in our bible as the "Garden of Eden." It is our non-observance of the sacredness of the earth and creation that we destroyed the ecological balance. We are not good shepherds of our sheep. We are not good tillers of God's garden. We have breached the covenant and God's design for life.

Our living in the valley of dry bones is not necessarily the result of the pandemic but the cause of the pandemic. However, this is more nuanced than simply saying that the pandemic was divine retribution for our disobedience as is now popularly understood by many among the religious. Long before the pandemic, prophets have been persecuted for exposing and naming the social virus – until the social virus became a contagion and afflicted not only all our human institutions but including the spiritual constitution and moral fiber of society. The result is, directly and indirectly, the global pandemic and the aggravation of the crisis by a morally unprepared world. The sum result is the mass experience of literally living like dry bones in the valley of death.

In conclusion, the story of an exiled people is also our story during this pandemic. What is keeping us from owning the vision of the prophet Ezekiel and having this vision of the full life inspires hope in us? And what is keeping us from heralding this hope of our rebuilding and restoration as a people, a global community, and as an earth community? None. The message is clear. We will be restored to experience and share the full life beyond the temporal promises of the new normal. +

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NOTE:

- *I will be preparing a separate essay on "Heralding" and on the "full life." The second of the series will be mainly a critique of our traditional historical heralding in favor of a more contextual-ecumenical (decolonial) appropriation of scriptural models of "heralding."*
- *HERALDING is another word for announcing. The word, "herald," in all its usages say the same, to announce, to communicate, to relay the message. The prophets heralded for God. John the Baptist was introduced as a herald. Jesus was baptized to herald. The apostles and their disciples, were sent to all the world to herald the good news of God's reign. The Christian is made to herald the advent of the reign of God and its being a present reality in our acts of mercy, in our doing of justice, and in our walking humbly with God. We exist as a church to herald in word and deed the new and just world.*
- *The second will be on the "full life." This is where an exegetical study of John 10:10 could be made. The second half of the essay on the "full life" Would dwell on UCCP statements and resolutions and how these contribute to the formation of our theology of the full life.*
- *Jeremiah's "to build and to plant"- with hope may also be pursued as another essay expounding on "restoring and rebuilding" since both prophets are prophesying on the same datum of history. The act of "uprooting" and "destroying" may help us understand the deeper meaning and requirement of restoring and rebuilding.*

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UCCP OFFICIAL THEME LOGO

QUADRENNIUM 2022-2026

REBUILDING AND RESTORING WITH HOPE: HERALDING THE FULL LIFE

Suggested text: Ezekiel 37: 1-14

Symbolism of Elements

Jesus said in John 10:10, "I came that they might have life and might have it abundantly." Heraldng such fullness of life evolves images like the **Green Cross**- which represents Christ's promise of an abundant and meaningful life for all. Such promises persist to dwell in every believer amidst pandemics, war, natural and human-made calamities, and economic and political collapse. The **shawl** defines our joy and creativity in doing God's mission to the world. The **White Dove** represents our peaceful means of attaining shalom. In Christianity, dove symbolizes Holy Spirit

- the Sustainer. As believer of God the Sustainer, we are called to be instrument of sustaining grace for all. In Old Testament, a dove was released by Noah after the flood in order to find land; it came back carrying a freshly plucked leaf, a sign of life after the flood. Here, dove is carrying the missing puzzle piece symbolizing that God calls us to rebuild and restore the world where love, peace, and justice prevails; to rebuild and restore the church into its calling as faithful instrument of God's sustaining love to the world. The piece of a puzzle that the dove is carrying is our humble part

of a contribution to the work of peace and healing to the broken world. We are but part of a puzzle we relate with others who are working for peace and justice in the world. **Kerosene Lamp**- Christ is the light of the world and we are sharing Christ's light for the fullness of life. In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." **Vine**- represents connectivity to God and God's creation. It brings us back to Christ's saying, that without God we are nothing. We depend on our existence, our life work, and our all to God alone. The **Brick Wall**- represents Nehemiah's rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem that invites collected effort and cooperation among members of the UCCP as well as the



communities where our local churches are located. The Brick Wall is encircled by the Community Circle which means our life work is but part of the global work, we work together amongst ourselves and with other faith communities and even with the rest communities who have different beliefs, cultures, and traditions. We belong to God's household of the whole creation-humans and other creatures of the world. The **missing puzzle pieces between earth and brick wall** represents brokenness due to the flight of God's people from the covenant relationship with God. **Community circle** represents the unity. The vine has a profound meaning like connection, strength, and determination. The unity of God's people is the strength of UCCP. With unity our determination in transforming both church and society becomes reality.

Below the theme reveals the following symbols; **Scroll**- represents an emblem of wisdom and an early emblem of the Apostles. Jeremiah 36:2 "Take a scroll and write on it all the words which I have spoken to you concerning Israel and concerning Judah, and concerning all the nations, from the day I first spoke to you, from the days of Josiah, even to this day. It symbolizes heralding. **Black lines** represent Bible, our action and our proclamation are deeply rooted in the Holy Bible. **Mechanical Gear, UCCP Logo, & Cross** which best describe our mechanism of the UCCP Life Work. The mechanical gear rotates the movement of our ecclesiastical life work founded by God's word. It is used to increase the power of a turning force that in a way gives us a view of our "sola scriptura" principle. It also represents progress, work, and innovation. In this logo, gear represent focus in this quadrennium – rebuilding and restoring – with hope that God is with us in our innovations.

Pandemic due to Corona Virus Disease 2019, escalating oil price hike, increasing unemployment rate, high hunger rate, extra judicial killings, red tagging, oppression, and exploitation of people and natural resource are the faces of brokenness in our world and country today.

REBUILDING AND RESTORATION are visions, hopes, and actions towards the realization of the full life. The full life means many things to the Scriptures. It is not unrelated to the social vision of shalom that you can find in the Old Testament, or to the gospel of the reign of God as proclaimed in the New Testament, or even the reconciled life in the Pastoral Letters. We can safely say that the gospel of the faith is the full life which we can experience in part or as a foretaste when God reigns in us, in our world, and creation. The scriptures also affirm that the full life was seen in the person of Jesus Christ and his work (John 10:10) and thus, something that was a reality in the passion, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

REBUILDING AND RESTORATION presupposes an experience of fragmentation and destruction. This narrative abounds in the Scriptures from the time of the fall (Gen 3:23) to the abandonment of God's people's covenant relationship with God (Ez 16:59). This separation from God has brought so much devastation in inter-human relations, in history, and to the earth (Romans 8: 22).

The theme's annexing of the word hope ("WITH HOPE") adds a perspective to the praxis of restoration and rebuilding. Set in their scriptural contexts, restoration and rebuilding are not easy. The fragmentation and the destruction were so thorough that even the concept of "original sin" was thought

of in theology, or that going through the eye of the needle (Mt 19: 24) and be “born again” (Jn 3: 1-7) are requirements of faith, or that we not only “wrestle with flesh and blood but with “powers and principalities” (Eph 6:12-18). To “build and to plant” (Jer 1:10) means you must dig deep into the roots of the human crisis, and this would invite resistance if not persecution. Rebuilding and restoring with hope acknowledges this context but at the same time negates this in the faithful’s act of radical hoping.

Rebuilding and restoring with hope points to our embracing the promise of the full life and the hope inspired by the full life. It is this hope that generates our “*gana*” for the full life. *Kapag ginanahan tayo*, the full life that we have embraced would be a reality in the here and now of our radical hoping.

The UCCP may be a little off the grid with its talking past the pandemic and its thematic agenda of "rebuilding and restoration with hope." The pandemic still rages on and there are surges now and then. Yet, it is precisely at this time when we need to muster that prophetic will to announce hope that life can be rebuilt and restored from the "valley of dry bones" (Ez 37:1-13). “Hope” to us as a faith community is the transgression of the normalization of life in the valley of dry bones. It is what aligns us to the vision of a fuller life for all. Hope is what could energize us into restoring and rebuilding our lives and institutions in this pandemic-ravaged world.

E.Y. 2023-2024 (75th Anniversary):

REBUILDING AND RESTORING WITH HOPE: HERALDING THE UNITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

Suggested Texts: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Symbolism of Elements

Celebrating our 75 years of UCCP Founding Anniversary takes us back to our biblical and protestant historical rootedness. The **White Cross**- Represents Christ's work of reconciliation. Like Christ reconciled all humanity and creation to God, we are also called to work for reconciliation rather than division, we are challenged to take the first move to connect and begin to reunite with those who departed from us. Like the organic union of UCCP, we need to open up possible unity with other faith communities. White Cross also represents the purity of our thoughts, intention, and humility. It brings us back to our historical rootedness and beginning as UCCP. **The red stole** calls for a festive celebration of our beginning and the **chalice** and the **sacramental bread** invite us all to celebrate Christ's presence from the beginning of our existence until today and towards our ecclesiastical future. The **bushes** represent the burning bush of Moses that called him to let God's people go. God's liberation from all forms of bondage is the very core of ecclesiastical existence. It also represents ONE BODY, MANY PARTS. Then **Clock** symbolizes our rich and meaningful heritage and



historical journey as a church amidst the changing times. The various watercolor **Christian Symbols** represent our mark of service to the world. We are known for our biased toward the poor, Lumad, and the oppressed, known for our ecumenical and interfaith solidarity, and partners and in solidarity with others who work for peace, development, and protection of all creatures. The **Pentagon** or 5 sidelines symbolizes the 5 Protestant traditions of the UCCP. The Pentagon also represents our Diamond Celebration of our UCCP.

At the center, you can see the symbol of "Two Hands holding together". It represents Christ's Hand with the nailed mark and the follower of Christ who responded to the calling to be partners of God's Mission to the world.

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In times where unity of the church is challenged, it is appropriate to think, look back, and contemplate; how is our church doing? Our church is very popular of its democratic processes in governance, where members can freely express their sentiments and opinions, however its unity in implementing decisions keep the vigor of our church much stronger. The pandemic affected our churches' routine. Worships, bible studies, and other church activities were suspended in fear of the coronavirus escalation. However, it motivated our churches to be more creative and more receptive to the call of our times. The Struggle for Unity in various discussions especially in property development of our church shook our strength but this made the member churches more aware, more concerned, and more responsive. It can be seen in our accomplishments and performances, especially the overwhelming wider mission support extended by various conferences. It is also a clear manifestation of the presence of democracy in all systems and processes of our church governance.

When Apostle Paul mentioned “ONE BODY, MANY PARTS”, it talks about unity of believers in the church regardless of their differences, whether race, especially the Greeks and the Jews, social status, culture and practices. Believers of the church of Corinth experienced division because of many beliefs brought by different leaders. Paul wanted to remind the people of the church of Corinth the faith rooted in the life of Jesus Christ. He inspired them to recognize their individual diverse talents and challenged to coordinate and synchronize their moves with the central of the head that is Jesus Christ. Apostle Paul emphasized the importance of unity in the church by submitting themselves to its right beliefs according to the teaching of Jesus Christ exemplified by His life.

The Unity of the Church is essential, it gives us hope despite our diverse heritage. Our Statement of Faith remains a true and correct guide to all of us. We are the body of Christ, the united community of those who have been restored to God through Jesus Christ, and entrusted with his work. Our Unity is vital in Rebuilding and Restoring our hope. When we herald the Unity of the Body of Christ, we also proclaim our trust and submission to the greatest authority of that One Body.

REBUILDING AND RESTORING WITH HOPE: HERALDING THE WORK OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

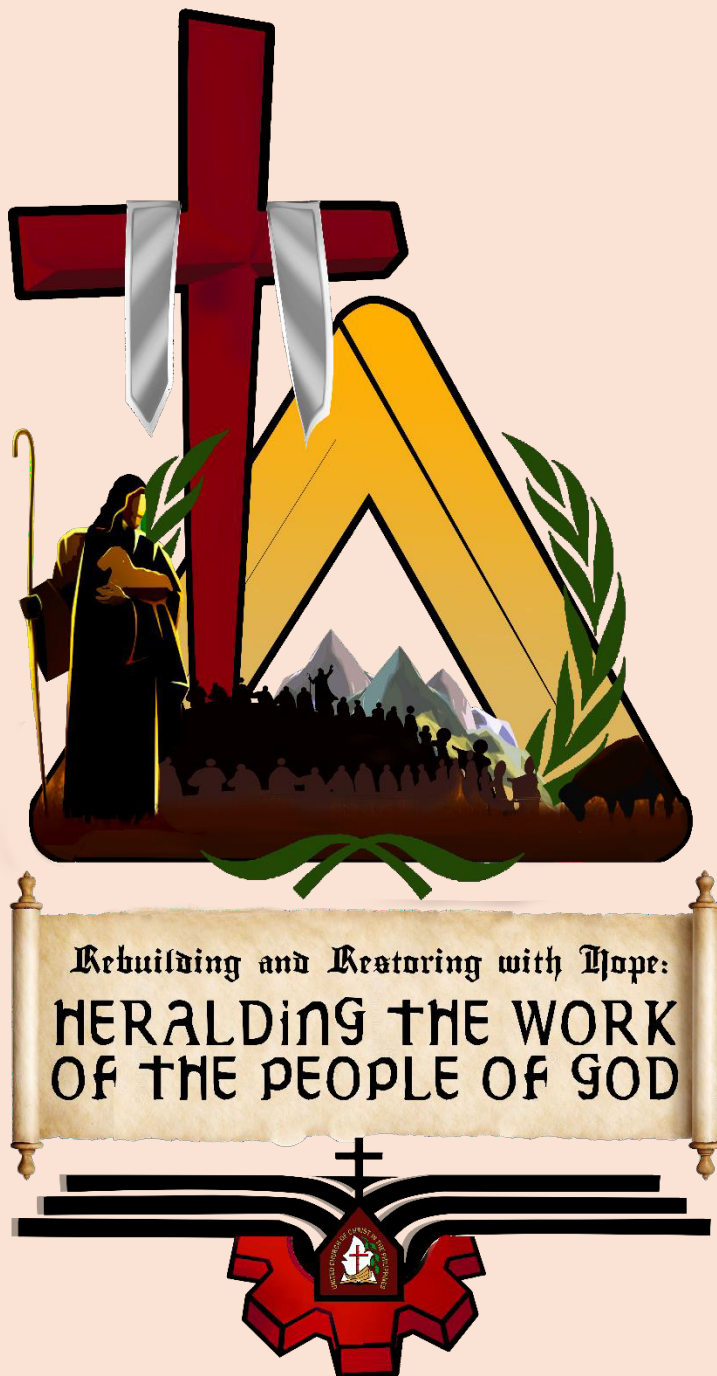
Symbolism of Elements

UCCP believes that God is at work to make each person a new being in Christ and the whole world in God's kingdom in which love, justice, and peace prevail. Heralding the work of the people of God is put into the following images; The **Cross and its white Stole**, the **Shepherd carrying a staff in its right hand and a lamb** on his left, the **triangle** wherein 2 branches of **palm** attached to it, and the **people** having a background by some mountains afar. The work of God's people has twofold- the Shepherding which involves caring for all the members, and the self-care of every individual. It also involves nurturing, disciplining and discipleship. There is an important value for every individual like Jesus' parable of the lost sheep, the shepherd will leave the 99 to find the lost

1. The **triangle** symbolizes the 3 ministries of Jesus- the Healing, Preaching, and Teaching ministry. It also symbolizes harmony, equality and balance. The **stole** represents the bonds and fetters with which Jesus was bound during his Passion and also denotes the duty to spread the Word of God

Again, below the theme reveals the following symbols; **Scroll**- represents an emblem of wisdom and an early emblem of the Apostles. It symbolizes heralding. **Black**

lines represent Bible. Our action and our proclamation are deeply rooted in the Holy Bible. **Mechanical Gear, UCCP Logo, & Cross** which best describe our mechanism of the UCCP Life Work. The mechanical gear rotates the movement of our ecclesiastical life work founded by God's word. It is used to increase the power of a turning force that in a way gives us a view of our "sola scriptura" principle. It also represents progress, work, and innovation. In this logo, gear represent focus in this quadrennium – rebuilding and restoring – with hope that God is with us in our innovations.



It's been years since the COVID 19 pandemic struck the world. Its horrendous outcome is still being experienced and continues to impact various facets of life. The pandemic has caused the Philippine economy to take a nosedive. In fact, such nosedive is described as the lowest since 1947 during the second World War. People's initiatives to bring to light the realities of our society are met with harshness and threats by those who profit from the pandemic. Such has made bouncing back and recovering from the pandemic a seemingly impossible task. The quest for an abundant and peaceful life remains a struggle and times continue to be uncertain especially for those who are at the margins of the society.

Today, we are hardly even at the verge of bouncing back or overcoming the pandemic. That quest for an abundant life remains a struggle and times have continued to remain uncertain. In the midst of the continuing uncertainty the church must continue to stand. The church ought to remain staunch in fulfilling and realizing her mission. The United Church of Christ in the Philippines since the very beginning has always been known for her faith and praxis, manifested especially in her firm commitment to justice, peace, and human rights, and her ministries with the marginalized sectors and communities. Since the very beginning UCCP existed not for itself but it's mission. This resolute commitment for mission is embodied in the UCCP Statement of Faith especially in the following statements:

WE BELIEVE... That the Church is the one Body of Christ, the whole community of persons reconciled to God through Jesus Christ and entrusted with God's ministry."

WE BELIEVE... That God is at work to make each person a new being in Christ and the whole world God's Kingdom in which love, justice and peace prevail. The Kingdom of God is present where faith in Jesus Christ is shared, where healing is given to the sick, where food is given to the hungry, where light is given to the blind, and where liberty is given to the captive and oppressed.

Persistently fulfilling God's ministry must be continually at the core of the life of the church. The sub theme **"HERALDING THE WORK OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD"** encourages us to ruminate on the following:

1. The works of the people of God...

What is this “*work of God’s people*” that we are speaking about? The work of God’s people refers to the mission that has been entrusted to those whom God called. This is humanity’s response to God’s work. The UCCP Catechetical guide on the SOF states that *God’s Work is to make each person a new being in Christ, and the whole world God’s Kingdom — in which love, justice, and peace prevail.* To ensure that this work is accomplished God calls people to take part in this mission. God calls us to participate in the process of building God’s kingdom. The purpose of God’s calling includes the following: to admonish, warn, direct, encourage, intercede, teach, and counsel. In the Old Testament times, God called prophets to do these works because according to 2nd Chronicles 36:15 God has compassion for his people and on His dwelling place.

The whole of 2nd Chronicles 36 speaks of the fall of Judah into the hands of the Babylonians. This dismal event in Israel’s history is often viewed as God’s judgment on Judah for their sins, especially of their leaders. Yet in this same chapter the writer emphasizes the compassion of God. God sent messengers to the people of Judah to constantly remind them because of His deep compassion.

Today God continues to call the church for such tasks especially in the face of all the challenges which is even more difficult with the pandemic. As mentioned earlier, the Covid-19 pandemic made the people’s condition even worse. What made matters even worse was the fact that those greedy for power made sure that they benefit from the pandemic. As we face the realities, we need to be more aware of our work as people of God.

2. The act of heralding the works of the people of God...

To herald is to announce and to proclaim. But what is it that we need to announce and proclaim? First and foremost, we need to proclaim the good news. This missionary mandate is clearly stipulated in Matthew 28:19. This missionary mandate that Jesus bestowed to the disciples is founded on the fact that God desires salvation for all. The writer of 1st Chronicles 16:23 declares “*Sing to the Lord all the earth. Tell of his salvation from day to day.*” This same message is also found in Psalms 96:1-2. This is a celebratory Psalm in praise of the one true God and the Creator of all things. This Psalm focuses on two main emphases: celebration and proclamation. To celebrate is to

make God the center of true worship in gratitude for the good and wondrous things God has done. One of the events which may have prompted the penning of this psalm was the recovery of the Ark of the Covenant. However, beyond celebrating is the call to proclaiming God's salvation to all the earth.

As we herald God's salvific and liberating acts, we must also herald the works of God's people. To herald the works of God's people is to both praise what has been achieved and to learn from errors that have been committed. People called by God to do God's work are far from perfect. The men and women in the bible called by God to participate in God's work had their share of flaws and weaknesses. Even Isaiah describes himself as "a man of unclean lips" in Isaiah 6:5. This declaration about himself came after witnessing a vision that tells of God's glory. Yet this humbling experience of Isaiah was not perceived as a hindrance in responding to God's call. Isaiah responded to God's call by emphatically saying "Here I am, Lord. Send me."

Heralding the works of God's people is to be like Isaiah who humbled himself before the Lord by accepting his iniquities yet at the same time sincerely committing himself to God's mission. Accepting our faults and iniquities is not a loss. In fact, it is a gain since it opens us to the transforming and renewing power of God as it did to Isaiah.

The renewing power of God in the lives of every member of the church ought to be manifested in each one's participation in the life and works of the church. The mission of the church does not end. Various tasks and responsibilities must be accomplished as the church continues the ministry of proclaiming God's wholistic salvation to the world.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the ever worsening political and economic unrest should not be seen as a hindrance to the realization of abundant life in Christ. Rather, it must serve as a challenge for the church to continually call on people who will say "Here I am, Lord. Send me." This Covid-19 aftermath necessitates a more steadfast commitment and greater vigor in doing God's work.

E.Y. 2025-2026 (77th Anniversary):

REBUILDING AND RESTORING WITH HOPE: HERALDING THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH

Suggested Texts: Isaiah 65: 17-25; Luke 3: 1-18; Rev. 21:1-7

Symbolism of Elements

*Heralding the New Heaven and New Earth can be pictured out with hands offering new creation order. The **Purple Cross** represents awaiting for this new heaven and new earth with a red stole that calls for celebration and festivity. The **creation** with all **the animals, people of different ages, genders, and beliefs** come together to celebrate God's newness of life. The **rainbow** that touches from heaven to earth emphasizes the connectivity of heaven and earth like Christ broke down the temple's curtain so also this promise of newness. The **Hands** present God's hand offering this new heaven and earth, all at the same time. There is no division, there is no status, no age, no gender, and no set of beliefs and traditions- all are gathering and celebrating. Here in the newness of things, the old things are gone. No more tears; no more death, no more mourning, crying, or pain. God will dwell with God's people.*



Below the theme reveals the following symbols;

Scroll- represents an emblem of wisdom and an early emblem of the Apostles. It symbolizes heralding. **Black lines** represent Bible. Our action and our proclamation are deeply rooted in the Holy Bible. **Mechanical Gear, UCCP Logo, & Cross** which best describe our mechanism of the UCCP Life Work. The mechanical gear rotates the movement of our ecclesiastical life work founded by God's word. It is used to increase the power of a turning force that in a way gives us a view of our "sola scriptura" principle. It also represents progress, work, and innovation. In this logo, gear represent focus in this quadrennium – rebuilding and restoring – with hope that God is with us in our innovations.

A herald, according to the Dictionary of Biblical Themes is “one who proclaims a message or paves the way for a promised event”. They at times pronounce judgment; at other times, they proclaim good news.

The Isaiah passage is a vision of hope. The 8th century prophets (Micah, Isaiah, Amos, and Hosea) as well as Jeremiah warned the people of God of the impending doom that will fall on them and their nations, Israel and Judah, because of the many injustices happening. The prophets warned that if there was no turn-around (repentance) from these situations of injustice and unpeace, they would be crushed by other nations. Amid the pronouncement of the coming judgment, Isaiah stood out as a prophet of hope. Beyond the downfall of Israel and Judah, Isaiah projected visions of hope for a better future (e.g., Isa. 9:1-7; 32:15-20). There would be restoration.

Among his proclamation was that of the new heaven and new earth. The newness envisioned is comprehensive (65:17); it will not just be a renovation, but a total restoration that eclipses the former state of things. *Hindi lang patse-patse; kundi buong-buo at bagong-bago.*

This rebuilding and restoration will be a cause of rejoicing (vv. 18-19). Isaiah is known for vivid imageries. In 9:2-3, he paints a gloomy picture of people walking in darkness and in the shadow of death. But rejoicing broke forth as they saw a great light. It was a rejoicing similar to that when harvest time is reached. It was a rejoicing when liberation comes, as in the breaking of the yoke of oppression that long overburdened them. He pictured the weapons of war being turned into tools of productions (9:5, see also 2:4 - swords into plows, spears into pruning hooks). There would be a government that would be established and upheld with justice and righteousness.

We also see in the Isa. 65 passage, Nature in Order. There is harmony in creation. As Barbara Lundblad puts it, “the peaceable kingdom where predators and their prey live side by side, and babies play unharmed near poisonous snakes”. She then added that “Woody Allen once gave his own interpretation of this vision: “The wolf shall lie down with the lambs. But the lambs won’t get much sleep.”

We can go further than Barbara Lundblad or Woody Allen, for in the peaceable kingdom the old categories no longer work or hold true, the old categories of predator and prey are no longer operational. “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and lion together, and the cow and the bear shall graze together.”

The lamb, the young goat, the calf, and the cow will have no more reason to be afraid. Why? It is because the wolf, the leopard, lion, and bear will acquire new taste buds - they will become vegetarians. Hallelujah! It says they will graze together. They will be consuming grass, and it is not the recreational variety now legal in California. *Ibang damo yun.*

This transformation reminds me of the story of that bully preying on small kids, scaring them with his tattooed body, depicting a snake and an eagle on his bare chest. He would move the muscles on his chest and it seems that the objects would come to life. “Gusto mo bang tuklawin ka ng ahas at ilipad ka ng agila doon sa mga ulap at saka ka ihulog?,” sabi niya sa isang batang nanginginig sa takot pero diniya namalayayn na dumating pala ang tatay ng bata na mas matangkad at doble na maskolado sa kanya. “Ano ang pinagmamayabang mong yan?,” turo ng tatay sa ahas na tattoo. “Earthworm po,” sabi ng bully. “Eh yan?,” turo sa agila. “Kalapati po.”

Sa pangitain ni Isaiah ang ahas ay magiging earthworm at ang agila ay magiging kalapati. Wala ng bully. Wala ng nangbibiktima at nabibiktima. No more predator and prey. Old hostilities give way to reconciliation and existing fears are laid to rest. Nature in order.

The second way to see this rebuilding and restoration is in a construction of social and economic levelled field. It is CASER - Christ's Advocacy for Socio-Economic Restructuring.

Luke quotes Isaiah 40:3 - The voice of one crying in the wilderness, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be filled; every mountain and hill shall be brought low. And the crooked shall be made straight. And the rough ways shall be made smooth.”

Luke, of course, was the very same Gospel writer who immortalized the Magnificat, which in part reads:

He has shown strength with his arm,
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate
he has filled the hungry with good things
and the rich he has sent empty away. (Luke 3:51-53)

This will be a great social and economic leveler.

Unpeace caused by the unequal distribution of wealth and by the continuing widening gap between the rich and the poor will soon be gone, and all will have their own vine and fig tree, they shall live in peace and unafraid.

Unpeace caused by big nations imposing their will against smaller nations; unpeace caused by mighty nations intervening and meddling in the affairs of weaker nations will just be a fading memory, mere footnotes in history. “God will judge between peoples and render decisions for mighty, distant nations. Then they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations will not lift up sword against nations, and they shall learn war no more” (Isa. 2:4).

In Revelation 21, God promises to make all things new. The rebuilding and restoration comes to full circle to the Creation story. Someone has remarked that our story begins in a garden and ends (or restarts) in a garden. Here in the newness of things, the old things are gone. No more tears; no more death, no more mourning, or crying, or pain. God will dwell with God’s people.