

Youth Sunday, March 20, 2022
Pockets of Paradise by Mary Salyards
Isaiah 11:1a, 3b; 6-9

When I reflected on this verse, it called to my mind the Garden of Eden; the images of a natural paradise with no conflict or disparity. There is no prey vs predator but rather peaceful coexistence. Where the wolf and the lamb lay together; where the lion and the ox eat together; and where children do not need to fear the bite of the vipers. A place of tranquility; a place of hope.

With that said, we are all constantly being shown examples that are the opposite to us; on a global, and community scale. On the news, we see refugees leaving Ukraine; we see the friends and families lost through this pandemic; we see the systemic injustice in our own community, we see the people lining up for soup kitchens; I see my fellow peers at school struggling to readjust to this “new normal” of post-pandemic life.

We see so much strife that this idea of this perfect paradise that is waiting for us can seem completely unobtainable at times. Sometimes, when this chaos and this discord seems to be overwhelming, this paradise seems particularly distant. But it is in these moments that you can look to God.

As people and members of our community, we have a responsibility to know what goes on around us and to be aware of this strife; but as Christians, we also have a responsibility to trust in God’s promise of paradise and look for the good in this world; to actively seek it out.

What does that mean? Well, in simple terms, it just means putting in the effort to find the good areas of the world; places that radiate hope and happiness; times in your life where you have felt safe and comfortable and warm; the people in your life that make you laugh and give you joy.

And when you find these areas of good, your own little pockets of paradise, hold on to it.

Let that good drive your faith in God’s promise. His promise for all that is come. Let that good aid your faith and aid your hope in humanity and in the future.

For example, while I have seen the strife, I have also seen the many volunteers working to help Ukrainian refugees when they reach their destination. I see health workers tirelessly dedicating their time to help the people in their communities most impacted by Covid-19. I see members of our community volunteering at soup kitchens and other organizations to provide care for those who need it. And I see the people in my school seeking support from their friends and the staff of my school.

However, these areas of good can be mundane things that are present in your everyday life. It could be meeting up for lunch with an old friend, cuddling with your pet, passing by the friendly old couple walking together in your neighborhood on your way to school.

I personally am at a point in my life that can seem somewhat overwhelming and filled with confusion. Graduation, college, roommates, FAFSA, majors, minors, new locations, and so much more.

Sometimes it gets to be too much, and I just have to ask “why does all of this have to happen right now? Why, when I still feel like a kid at times, do I need to figure this out in a span of a year? I mean, who came up with that system?” And it’s in those moments that I start to lose hope. I start to think that the time when I have all of this figured out is unobtainable, a far, far distant future. But that’s when I need those little pockets of paradise.

For me, music brings me so much joy. I get in the car after school, open Spotify, and sing all the way home. It may not sound like much, but it helps. It centers me and by the time I get home, I feel better. These areas of good, when I find them, I hold onto them, and it is through them that I have faith. I have faith that I will be able to figure this out, and I have faith that it will all work out in the end. It reminds me that God is with me and that I am not alone in these times of my life.