

Sermon 11-25-18  
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Trinity Lutheran Church  
W. Hempstead, NY  
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### **The Desert Blooms**

In the gospel lesson we just read, Jesus told all Christians to be on guard and keep awake for His second coming. He told us that immediately before He returns there will be signs in the sun, the moon and the stars – a regular shakeup in the heavens. Nothing of the sort appears to be going on. But there is something going on with the sun that has attracted my attention.

You're going to hear a lot more about climate change in the days to come. The mainstream media finally has begun reporting the unusual weather events that have been happening all over the world. However, their mantra will be that it's all a result of the global warming caused by humans burning fossil fuels – that is until it's quite clear that something else is going on. It's our star, the sun that is the source of our climate change.

No doubt the sun has nuclear reactions within it from the intense heat. But since the upper atmosphere of the sun is multiple times hotter than the surface, I subscribe to the new theory that the source of the sun's energy, as with all stars, is really the giant electrical arc in its atmosphere caused by incoming negatively charged plasma from the universe interacting with the positively charged sun.

We've already known for years that the sun is a giant electro-magnet. However, this new theory explains the electro-magnetism as something that comes from the sun's relationship with the same plasma of the universe that causes it to shine. Thus, the sun, like all stars, is subject to the conditions being thrown at it from the galaxy and beyond.

Now, the powerful electro-magnetic forces of the sun interact with all the sun's planets, including our earth. Therefore, the real source of climate change on earth is the electro-magnetic changes in our star.

It has long been known that the sun goes through an eleven-year cycle with sunspots increasing and waning. Sunspots are electro-magnetic storms. When there are lots of sunspots during these cycles, the earth warms. But when there are few sunspots during these cycles, recorded history tells us that the earth cools and the weather becomes quite dramatic. We have now entered such a period of low sunspot activity. Some are predicting that it may last for quite a while. Some are predicting that in the next couple of years there will be massive weather-caused crop failures throughout the world and food will become scarce and expensive. They say it's happening already. For instance, this year the hop crop failed in Europe and beer has doubled in price there. There's also a shortage of potatoes in the Old World and the ones harvested are of poor quality.

Unusual weather events are happening worldwide. We just had our coldest Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade ever. But my attention has been drawn to the

Middle East. In the beginning of November, Kuwait City – a city in a desert – had a rain event where it received an entire year’s rainfall in one day. This would not be newsworthy, except the same thing has happened twice more in November.

Here’s the result in pictures. [Kuwait City](#) been drastically flooded three times and November is not over. What’s going on?



The Arabian Peninsula is all desert with the exception of the highest mountains. Yet, the peninsula has had rain events in the last several weeks that have turned areas of the desert into a lake.

Here are pictures of [vehicles stranded on a desert highway](#) in at least three feet of water for as far as the eye can see. That brown stuff burying the vehicles is not sand. It’s dirty water.



Most deserts receive occasional localized prolonged cloudbursts. These may happen in any given area once in a decade or longer. The result is that seeds that have lain dormant since the last great rainfall spring to life. The desert then blooms magnificently as we see here.



Right now in Arabia, [sections of the desert are even turning green](#) as we can see from this aerial picture.



This would be no news if it were not for the fact that these episodes of rain are suddenly becoming more frequent. The question is: is this pattern a one-off, or will it endure. For, there is evidence that in the past vast sections of the Sahara were fertile. Even the Middle East was much more fertile at some points in history. Are we again entering such a time?

Now as I considered this, bells went off in my mind about the desert blooming. Therefore, I opened my concordance and began searching the bible for all occasions of the word, "desert." What I found is most pronounced in the book of Isaiah. In that book Yahweh promises to turn fertile lands into deserts. He also promises to turn deserts into fertile lands.

Isaiah was written about 2,600 years ago. But that doesn't really matter. Quoting Psalm 90:4, Peter says in 2 Peter 3:8-9, "8... With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." Therefore, something predicted 2,600 years ago could be coming to fulfillment in our day. We will have to wait and see.

So, in Isaiah Yahweh claims to be the source of deserts and desertification on earth. For instance, here's what it says in Isaiah 50:1-3, "1 This is what the LORD says: '... 2 When I came, why was there no one? When I called, why was there no one to answer? Was my arm too short to ransom you? Do I lack the strength to rescue you? By a mere rebuke I dry up the sea, I turn rivers into a desert; their fish rot for lack of water and die of thirst. 3 I clothe the sky with darkness and make sackcloth its covering.'" There are other passages like this one. Throughout Isaiah Yahweh finds the people of earth, and His people, Israel, guilty of sin, and He punishes them for it. And as we just read, even the punishments of Yahweh can take generations to

develop. A day is like a thousand years. So, is the desertification of the earth that has progressed for centuries one of His judgments against us? He says so.

On the other hand, there are multiple instances in Isaiah where Yahweh announces that He will turn deserts into fertile land. Here's one from Isaiah 41:17-20, "17 'The poor and needy search for water, but there is none; their tongues are parched with thirst. But I the LORD will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. 18 I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs. 19 I will put in the desert the cedar and the acacia, the myrtle and the olive. I will set pines in the wasteland, the fir and the cypress together, 20 so that people may see and know, may consider and understand, that the hand of the LORD has done this, that the Holy One of Israel has created it.'"

In the driest deserts no trees grow. If there's some moisture available – usually at higher elevations – low growing, stunted trees like juniper will grow. But the trees mentioned in these verses won't grow unless there is adequate rain for at least part of the year. This would only be possible in a desert only if the climate changes.

Now, the passage that really attracted my attention is Isaiah chapter 35. Isaiah 35:1-2, "The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, 2 it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God." Notice. Yahweh claims that He will be responsible for turning desert into fertile land. It's a great and amazing promise.

Isaiah 35: 3-4, "3 Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; 4 say to those with fearful hearts, 'Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.'" So the desert richly blooming and salvation have something to do with one another.

Isaiah 35:5-6, "5 Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. 6 Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. 7 The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow." Reeds and papyrus grow along rivers and lakes. The really important part of this prophecy concerns the blind, the deaf, the lame, and the mute. These are Messianic miracles. They are precisely the miracles Jesus performed. Notice then, that there's a connection between the changing of deserts into fertile land and Messiah.

Isaiah 35: 8-10, "8 And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it. 9 No lion will be there, nor will any ferocious beast get up on it; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, 10 and the ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away."

This is the most amazing of all. The desert turning into fertile land is connected to the highway of holiness. This is the Lord's highway. It's the highway of repentance and faith in the Messiah. It's the way humanity regains the image of God.

In case you don't know it, Zion is another name for Jerusalem. But the Zion spoken of here is the eternal Jerusalem, the same one as prophesied in Revelation. It is the city of God where all are holy – resurrected human beings saved from this earth, angels and the Lord Himself. This city is where human righteousness will again match the righteousness of our Creator. All who believe the Son are destined to be there. This is part of the gospel.

So, would the turning of Middle Eastern deserts into fertile land be a sign of Jesus' return? It's hard to say. However, it would be a definite sign of climate change. And that kind of climate change would be a sign of something going on with our sun. And Jesus said that signs in the sun would precede His return. Therefore, as Jesus said, be on watch.

One thing is for sure. When Jesus returns, this age will be over. And Jesus said that when that happens it will be like a door closing. No one else will be permitted to enter the Kingdom of God other than those who already have entered.

Understand that Jesus Himself is the door into the Kingdom of God. As we saw several weeks ago, the Lord stands with open arms saying Today is the Day to enter in to my Kingdom. Come in and enter my rest. Travel down the highway of righteousness with me. Be joined to me as I have joined myself to you.

Remember, we have seen in Genesis that the original sin of Adam caused Adam and Eve – and us with them – to fall from the perfect "Image of God". We are only in the "Likeness of God". In the "Likeness of God," Yahweh permits each of us to sit on His great throne, defining good and evil for ourselves. He also permits us to act on our own definitions of good and evil.

But our definitions of good and evil are not Yahweh's. How do we know this? Yahweh's definitions and commands are found in the Torah and the prophets. Anything that Yahweh commands is Law. And, Yahweh's Law glaringly reveals our rebellion and sin – both personal and corporate sin. Sin is rebellion against His definitions of good and evil. Sin is pretending that we can sit on Yahweh's throne and define good and evil for ourselves. Sin is acting on our own definitions.

Now, despite human sin, it has been Yahweh's plan from the beginning to restore humanity to His perfect image. Evil cannot dwell with goodness. Sin cannot dwell with perfect righteousness. The good must crush the evil, even as we see in this sin-marred universe.

So, in order for Yahweh's plan to be fulfilled, He sent His only begotten Son. Jesus came sinless, born of a virgin, as we will soon celebrate at Christmas. The Word became flesh for our sake. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day He was raised from the dead. He now sits at the right hand of the Father. From there, He will eventually come again to judge both those living at the time and those who died. This is Jesus' second coming, the event we look forward to today at the end of one church year and next week in Advent, the beginning of another church year.

How will Jesus judge when He returns? Scripture is clear on this. Revelation 20:13 and other places tell us it will be on the basis of what each person has done in life. Every person's life stands as an open book before the Judge of all the earth. So, how do you think you'll do? Have you ever lied in a significant way? Well, then, you're a liar. Have you ever stolen or cheated someone? Well, then, you're a thief.

Have you ever been angry enough with someone to wish them dead? Then, you're a murderer as Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. Have you ever had sex outside of marriage? Well, then, you're either an adulterer or fornicator. How do you think you'll do before the righteous Judge of all the earth? If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. (1John 1:8) This is why we say in the confession of sins that we justly deserve God's eternal punishment.

However, there is a blessed alternative – Yahweh's plan from the beginning given through the Jesus who suffered and was crucified for our sin, the Jesus who suffered punishment in our place. Jesus said in John 6:29, "... 'The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.'" He said in John 6:40, "... 'my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.'" He said in John 5:24, "... 'whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.'" So there's something else we can "do" in life that will bring a different judgment upon us. That something is Jesus Himself. Jesus is the road to Zion. He is the way to the righteousness of God because He is our righteousness. Jesus is the great gift of God freely given. Anyone who believes Jesus will not be condemned for their sins. Instead, they have eternal life.

As it says in John 3:16-19, "16 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.'"

Whoever believes in the Son will not be condemned. It's that beautiful. It's that gracious. When the books of judgment are opened, those who by the grace of God have believed the Son will find that their names have been written in God's Book of Life. This is God's promise, His Gospel.

Let us then repent of our God-playing and believe the good news. We can have eternal goodness and eternal life with Yahweh. The spiritual deserts in our lives can become fertile ground as we wait and see what our Creator does with the physical deserts of the earth. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the NIV.