

About a year or so ago, my oldest daughter Madison was in 1st Grade and was attending the school around the corner from our house. I picked her up from school, and as we began walking home, I was running through the typical questions about her day. How was your day? Who did you play with? What was your favorite part of the day? And then I asked her what she learned today.

**Madison - "Oh Dad! I learned something terrible today!"**

**Me - "Oh really, what is that?"**

**Madison - "So. As you know, lately we have been learning a lot about the ocean and animals in the ocean. And today I learned that a lot of animals in the ocean are dying because there is so much garbage in the ocean! It doesn't have to be like that!"**

**Me - "That's terrible."**

**Madison - "Yeah, I really hope the ocean gets cleaner, it doesn't have to be like that!"**

She was heartbroken. She couldn't believe that something so seemingly simple could affect our world in such a way. So, when we got home, we did our normal routine, and then she disappeared for a while. When I went and found her, she was making flyers to handout around the neighborhood that said, "Don't throw garbage in the ocean." She asked if we could go around the neighborhood knocking on doors and handing out the flyers. So, with all the righteous vigor of a 1st grader on a mission to bring ecological justice, we took to the streets and knocked on doors as she talked with our neighbors about garbage in the ocean.

What strikes me about this story is how Madison was charged by this vision of hope. She had the knowledge and vision that things didn't need to be the way they were, she was moved by a vision of hope toward action to bring about whatever change she could. But it was this insistence, built from a foundation of hope, that brought about change.

Did her posters bring environmental justice to our world? Probably not. Did her activism bring change? Most likely not. But there was something profound in her actions. She was provoked by a deep sense that the world shouldn't be this way and that it doesn't have to be this way. In some sense, there was a vision buried within her that hoped and longed for something greater, for something more sustainable for our world. Madison wasn't content with passively waiting for the ocean to become cleaner, but instead, she actively waited by embodying the hope for a new world, here and now.

### **Discontent in Our World**

In some sense, this discontent is what we see playing out in our world today. The countless political debates and arguments that rage in our public discourse, whether it is the border wall and immigration, racial

tensions, #MeToo, gun violence, etc. There is a longing, a sense that our world isn't the way it's supposed to be. We can all feel it; we can all sense it. Whether it is the shooting in Aurora on Friday, or the continuing unrest in the middle east, our world is broken. But as I look at the passionate discourse that takes place across the nation, it speaks to me that we all feel that brokenness. We may not all agree about what will solve this brokenness, but we all feel that something isn't right. There is buried in our consciousness a sense that things need to be fixed.

For the Christian, we hold to the story of truth that makes sense of this deep longing and brokenness. We understand sin has fractured creation, and it is in need of healing. The story is about God's work in restoring and reconciling all things back to him.

**"For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." - Col. 1.19-20**

We hold this hope, as Christians, that one day God will reconcile all things. That someday, out on the horizon, Jesus will return, and the restoration of all things will take place. This is the hope of the prophets in the Old Testament, this is the hope of the disciples, and this is the hope of all believers here-and-now.

**"From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward-looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present" (Jürgen Moltmann).**

The Christian story is one that is forward-looking, and forward-moving. It is moving toward Jesus' return to bring about the fullness of the New Creation. And this is the subject of the text. As we have seen the past few weeks, Jesus is in the middle of what is known as the "Olivet Discourse," and the discourse focuses largely on what is to come.

And so right in the middle of the discourse comes this parable by Jesus. It's been 3-4 chapters since we have had a parable, so I want to mention a few words about parables before we jump in. Parables were one of Jesus' favorite methods of teaching. But too often we reduce parables to cute and clever illustrations. They are not "just" stories, or "just" illustrations, with the real stuff found elsewhere. New Testament theologian, Scot McKnight, defines parables as "fictional stories depicting an alternative world." The essence of his parables probe into the mindset he wants from his followers: Imagine a world like this.

The story - the parable - takes you into its world where you will encounter a short sketch of a reality/world that represents what could be if people lived like this. The parable invites you into an imagined world.