

“New Heaven and New Earth”

Revelation 21: 1-7

21 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home^[a] of God is among mortals.

He will dwell^[b] with them;

they will be his peoples,^[c]

and God himself will be with them;^[d]

⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away.”

⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.”

Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” ⁶ Then he said to me,

“It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I

will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ Those who conquer will

inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

This week we wrap up our series on weird stories found in our Bible. And I am not sure why this one was chosen because there are sections of the Book of Revelation which are a lot weirder than this one, sections which include crazy Visions, Strange imagery, and unbelievable happenings. Out of all the stories we have covered in this series, from bear attacks to talking donkeys, this one is just not that weird.

Rather it is a text which we have normalized. We have done so by reading it in worship services throughout the year. We often share this text during our gatherings as communities of faith. We are familiar with this text because it is such a large part of our Christian tradition. This is a text we often turn to because it tells us of the fundamental hope we hold as people of faith, the hope that God's Kingdom will come here on Earth, the hope that one day, God will dwell among God's people.

For us as people of faith, there is nothing weird about this text at all. Because it describes the very thing which gives us strength when we are overwhelmed. It tells of the very energy which gives us courage when we can't go on. This text tells us of the promise which brings us peace when it all becomes too much, the promise that soon and very soon, God will dwell among God's people and all will be made well.

Of course, I will admit that some weird stuff does happen in our text, weird stuff like the sea vanishing and the earth being no more. However, as we look at this text, we must remember that we are dealing with an apocalyptic text, a text which describes the theology of the "end times" or eschatology. Eschatology is one of those fancy church words we can use to impress our friends or win at Jeopardy. It comes from two Greek words which mean last and study.

In Revelation, regardless of the crazy visions and the strange imagery, God doesn't destroy the world. Rather, we are told God comes down to dwell with God's people. This is reminiscent of the time during the people's wilderness wanderings when God's Spirit came down and dwelled in the tabernacle. This is reminiscent of when the Word Became Flesh and came to dwell among the people. This promise of God coming to dwell in and among God's people is woven throughout our sacred text, telling us that God is the Alpha and the Omega, that God is our beginning and our ending and everything in between.

This vision of a new heaven and a new Earth reminds us how our story as people of faith began when God first brought forth life and light. In the beginning, we are told that the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness."

The very first act of creation was overcoming chaos. Now in the last book of our Bible, God overcomes chaos once more. The "presence of God among God's people means the removal of all human hurt." No more darkness. No more chaos. No more tears.

However, as we look at the world around us, we know that this hope has not been fully realized. Our present reality is not what God fully intended when God called creation good...not when there is pollution destroying our environment, not when there is poverty eroding the quality of life for so many, not when there is injustice, hurt and hate filling our streets each and every day.

As we look at the world around us, it would be so easy for us to lose hope. Yet we know something that this world does not know. We know that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as people of faith, death will not have the last word. We know darkness will not have the last word. We know that God is present here and now, actively working to bring healing and wholeness, not to a select few but to all of God's children.

You see, this vision of the new heaven and the new earth found in our text today is not just about some future light years away. It is also about our present reality. As people of faith, we hold onto the promises given to us by our God, a promise which empowers us to never settle for the narrative of power and might but rather celebrate the narrative of how the weak will be made strong, and the humble will be lifted up. As people of faith, we know how the story ends....a restored Creation made new through the grace and love of God.

This is our future. This is our present. As the people of God who pray each day that one day on Earth as it is in heaven, we continue to work to make this vision a reality. We wait for the new heaven and the new earth to come fruition. And while we wait, as people of faith, we hold secure to the promise that God is our beginning and our ending. We hold to the promise that God is at work in this world, bringing healing and wholeness for all of God's people. We hold to the promise that love and light will always have the last word.

May it be so. Amen.