

November 22, 2009

Scripture: Revelation 1: 4b-8

Sermon: "Alpha and Omega"

We've made it through another year. Today is the end of the year. No I haven't lost my mind. I'm talking about the end of the liturgical church year. Today is the last Sunday in the Church year and we celebrate Christ the King Sunday. And there is no more appropriate text for this Sunday than our Scripture today where we hear the assurances about the nature of our God. Our God was, is and will come. Our God is the Alpha and the Omega. Our God is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Thanks be to God!

And we find these words in the last book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation. For many of us, the Book of Revelation is not really one we turn to for a word of comfort. In fact, we may not turn to it all because well, to be honest-it has a lot of weird imagery in it. And we have all heard these images used to predict the end of the world. We have all heard these images from the Book of Revelation used as signs or code. We think of the images from this Book when we hear the phrase "left behind."

And if the truth be told, many of us would really like to end our Bible a little earlier and leave out the Book of Revelation and we are in pretty good company for that. Many of the church fathers didn't see the value of the Book of Revelation. It's not logical. It's kind of out there. And the message gets lost in the translation or should I say interpretation. It seems like this book is used more often than not to divide the Christian community than unite it. It seems like this book was written for a time that is so unlike ours that it has lost its usefulness with its fanciful imagery, down right scary language, and cosmic battle scenes.

For us to really understand this Book of the Bible we must look at its context. The Book of Revelation is a letter to seven churches and since seven is a complete number, a perfect number in the Bible, this letter is really written to all churches. And this letter was written to be read during worship in one setting. This letter was written to celebrate and to give comfort and to all Christians. This letter starts with a word of praise: God was, God is, and God will come. God is the Alpha and the Omega.

These very verses that we are reading today have inspired some of our most favorite and meaningful hymns and songs of praise!

And if you think about it, these few verses sum up the very core of our hope as Christians. God was with the world in the beginning, actively creating and shaping our world. God has been with the world throughout history, actively communicating with God's people and holding them in the palm of God's hand. And God will continue to be in our lives as people of faith because God is actively working our world through us to bring about the Kingdom of God. And the Good news is that it is in God's hands! The salvation of this world does not rely on you or me! Thanks be to God!

Because I will admit there are times when I'm doing good just to keep up with myself! Let alone, trying to keep up with the world. And the Good News is that it is not up to you and me. God has already won! Everything is in God's hands! God has already saved this world!

These few verses capture the hope and the Good News of the Gospel. We are not alone. We worship an active God who is right here beside us, holding us in the palm of God's hand. We worship a God who ultimately has won the cosmic battle and is Lord of Lords and King of Kings! We worship a God who loves us so much that God gave God's only Son for you, for me and for all of God's children.

When we look at these few verses, we hear that we have been given the best things on earth and heaven: the grace and peace of God. And that we have been made priests in the Kingdom of God, serving our God and serving others because God first loved us.

When we hear these words, we hear a word of comfort. And more importantly a word of hope. And we realize that our community is not much different than the community that John is writing to in his letter. And we realize that our struggles of faith are not much different than the community that John is writing to in his letter. We realize that John's word of comfort and hope is for all churches for all time.

Yes, we may live in different areas of the world. And yes, we live in a different era. And we as modern day Christians aren't persecuted for our faith and thankfully we live in a nation where we celebrate the right to freedom of worship. But really we aren't much different than the Christians who John writes to in his letter.

For Christians throughout history and even now, we have struggled with this here but not yet situation concerning the Kingdom of God. We are called to live out the principles of the Kingdom of God here on earth, knowing that at some point in the future, God will come and create a new kingdom, a new creation, a new Jerusalem. And so we find ourselves living out this dichotomy of here but not yet. We celebrate that we are a part of God's Kingdom that is not like the kingdoms of this world. We celebrate that we have citizenship in God's Kingdom but we live in world that calls us to live according to the laws of this world's kingdoms. And sometimes the laws of the two kingdoms do not agree.

Like Christians throughout history, this interesting dichotomy of here but not yet has sometimes placed us outside the norms of culture because it calls us to give voice to the voiceless, live out God's justice in all our deeds and actions, and calls us to speak out against the injustices that we see in our world. We live out the principles of the Kingdom of God such as justice, grace, peace, and mercy in a world where the principles of earthly kingdom are power, greed, oppression, and violence.

We have to look no farther than Jesus himself to see how this dichotomy plays out in our world. Jesus came and did some radical teaching. He called for the people to take care of the least of these. He ate with tax collectors and prostitutes. He taught peace as a way to live. He reminded the people of the covenant with God and with each other. That all our deeds and words should be based in the love of God.

And we know the story about what the powers that be did in response to Jesus' teachings and preachings. We know that to shut him up and to shut him down, Jesus was betrayed and crucified. Because the message that he brought shook too many foundations. The message was dangerous because power was not in control, greed was not in control. His message needed to be

stopped because it threatened the very principles of their kingdoms and so the powers that be crucified Jesus.

And so the question that faces us Christians and has faced Christians throughout history, as followers of Jesus Christ, how can we expect anything less than the same treatment as our Lord and Savior at the hands of the powers that be? Contrary to belief and preaching of many modern day TV evangelists, being a Christian is not easy nor is it free. Our faith is not designed to bless our lives with material items or based on the principle that if you believe and are good, good things happen to you.

In fact, the principles of the Kingdom of God go against the grain of this world and against the modern day message of Christianity. And that is what the Book of Revelation's message is for us as people of faith. It reminds us that this world is built on a foundation of power, greed, injustice, violence and oppression. The Kingdom of God is built on a foundation of love, peace, grace, and hope. And we are called to be priests serving God and each other in the Kingdom of God in this dichotomy of here but not yet on earth.

John writes down his revelation as a word of hope, a word of comfort, and yes a word of warning. John wants to remind his community and Christians everywhere that our God is the real deal. Our God was. Our God is. Our God will come. Our God is the Alpha and the Omega.

And we are reminded through John's revelation, that sometimes it is hard to be a Christian. His revelation serves a warning that we are called to be people of faith, and that this will sometimes put us as "odds" with the powers that be and that we can't get too comfortable or complacent with our faith. And most importantly, his revelation serves as a reminder that God has already won! Everything is in God's hands. God has been, is, and will continue to be active in our lives. And we have experienced the greatest gifts of all: the grace and peace of God.

And so we are called to live out lives of thanksgiving, know that it is our God from whom all blessings flow. We are called to live out the principles of the Kingdom of God here on earth, and hold onto the promises that this world does not have the last word, God does. We are called to live out lives of hope, an active hope that challenges us to change the world around us, to give voice to the voiceless, to live out God's justice through all of our deeds and actions.

And we are called not to worry because our God was, our God is, and our God will come. Our God has dominion and glory forever and ever. Our God is the Alpha and the Omega. Our God loves us and has freed us. Our God has made us priests in God's Kingdom. Our God is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

Thanks be to God!

May we always live lives of thanksgiving, remember from whom all blessings flow! Amen

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