

## “The Vision”

Sermon for the Seventh Sunday of Easter

May 16, 2010 – The Rev. Torrence Harman

Acts 16:16-34; Psalm 97; Rev. 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21; John 17:20-26

It is perhaps a wonder that The Book of Revelation made it into the canon of scripture that Christians consider authoritative. Why it made it into the New Testament Canon is subject to conjecture. When it was written, who wrote it, is also up for grabs. Many would simply say it is a strange book. Most folks would rather simply avoid it.

It is apocalyptic. It presents a vision of the end times. It is full of lurid detail. It is about judgment and it does not paint a particularly pretty picture throughout most of its chapters. Scenes of Revelation have been the subject of many an artist's canvas – the four horsemen of the apocalypse, the beast, the Lamb holding a blood red cross, depictions of heaven and hell. It has been the subject of poems and books and series of books – such as a few years ago – “The Left Behind” series.

The cataclysmic events described in the Book of Revelation seem to attract a certain population of readers. The themes of the Book of Revelation seem to have a primal attraction for some – particularly for those with a judgmental orientation. Those who focus on identifying the sheep from the goats, the saved from the lost, the good from the bad, those whose names may be listed in the “Book of Life” from those whose names are not.

In our Revised Common Lectionary (the series of Bible readings set out over a three year period) passages from the Book of Revelation appear only ten times. If we consider the Church's assertion that “the Scriptures contain everything necessary for salvation,” it is fascinating that passages from the Book of Revelation appear so little.

But it is significant what passages do appear in the Common Lectionary. Five of the ten come from Chapters 21 and 22, the final chapters of the Book and of the entire Bible. It is passages from these two books that our Lectionary has strung together and offered these last few Sundays.

They offer us a final vision. It is one of a new heaven and a new earth – beyond the cataclysmic scenes of death and destruction. The beast is dead, the Lamb has prevailed and heaven and earth are no longer divorced from each other – but reconciled. The Lamb announces, yet again, his purpose: “I make all things new.”

Some say that the landscape painted in these last two chapters is not just a vision (possibly prophetic), but a fantasy. Beyond any future reality. Just a fantasy arising out of a desire to escape from the problems and contradictions of life. Is it simply a Disneyland fantasy – this vision of a new heaven and a new earth? Or does it have something real to offer us as we go about our lives day by day?

Two Sundays ago, the vision:

“I saw a new heaven and a new earth . . . . The holy city, coming down out of heaven from God. . . . See, the home of God will be among mortals; God will be with his peoples. . . . The one seated on the throne, the Lamb saying ‘See, I am making all things new.’”

The message? God wants to be so very near to us – so among us – a “hands on” “I am really with you always” Divine strength and support in our lives. It’s the Genesis vision of God walking among us in the Garden.

Last Sunday, the vision:

A view of “the river of the water of life, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. On either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, continually producing fruit; and the leaves of the tree, for healing. . . .”

The Message? That in this vision there is nourishment available to us that is life giving and abundant. That there is a source of healing available to all.

Today, the vision:

Jesus, the Alpha & Omega, the beginning and the end, as the bright morning star. The call: Come. And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift. Come.

The message: Life is a gift. Come and get it!

The view is one of harmony, connection, nearness, life, fruitfulness, healing. The Alpha and the Omega bringing all things together, calling “Come, come.”

This view, this vision, is one of heaven on earth. We are called to come, to live into that vision. It is a vision that started in the Garden in Genesis, in the very beginning of creation. The Tree of Life stood in the Garden, untouched. It remains in the final vision.

This is a vision crafted, molded, created out of the heart of God. One in which all of God’s creation lives together in peace, with God in the midst of it. All of us sensing and honoring our connection with the earth, with each other and with God. That’s the idea of harmony. And the threads that bind us into harmony and a fruitful and abundant life are love, care, mutual respect, a sense of the dignity of all parts of this creation and their importance in God’s great scheme of on-going, eternal life for the world.

The voice calls, “Come, come now.”

What do we need to do to respond to this call? What would our response look like as we come?

We would recognize just how interconnected we are with the earth: with its rivers, bays, oceans; with its land, the forests, farmlands, plains and deltas, the mountains; with all growing things.

We would recognize just how interconnected we are with all creatures, especially each other and with all of God’s people on earth.

We would recognize that we can’t live abundantly, fruitfully in wholeness and health without a connection to God – our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

We would recognize that we can't make this vision happen on our own. It's God vision, after all. We need to tap into Divine energy – into a Divine presence in our lives to energize, strengthen and support our efforts to live into such a world. That's what our message next week will be about. Pentecost. God's Holy Spirit coming to be with us, within us, among us – to lead us into this vision.

May the message of this final vision in Revelation become part of your life, your hopes, your dreams, yes, even your fantasies. It is the vision of eternal life. And it is not just some yet-to-come possibility. The call to come is to come, here and now. The vision must start, right here, right now, with all of us, if it is to come to be.

If we are not living with compassion, with dignity, with a sense of respect for all living things . . . . if we are not living with a sense of our connectedness with all God has made . . . . we are diminished and each lesser than God wants us to be. And the world, of which we are a part, is lesser than the vision God has for Creation.