

Sunday, April 24
Fifth Sunday of Easter

Revelation 21:1-6

¹I 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. ²And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them;

⁴he 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.”

⁵And 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.” ⁶Then 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.”

Dear disciples of the Risen Lord:

Grace and peace from God.

In Revelation 21:5, the “one who was seated on the throne” says, “See, I am making all things new.” In John 13:34, Jesus says, “I give you a new commandment.” Peter’s experience in Acts is but one example of the way Easter has turned the world around. “Making all things new” is a sound bite that perfectly sums up the Easter season. How can you open your eyes to the new thing God is doing? ¹

The glory of Christ—and of his followers—is rooted in sacrificial love. The 2013 blockbuster animated film *Frozen* features several examples of true love expressed through sacrifice. First, the snowman Olaf is willing to give his life to help Princess Anna, saying, “Some people are worth melting for.” At the film’s climax, Anna sacrifices herself to save her sister, Elsa’s life, which Olaf describes as “an act of true love.” After this, Elsa realizes that her strongest power comes from showing love instead of living in fear, changing her life and her kingdom forever.

The wildly popular novels and movie adaptations of *The Hunger Games* trilogy, by Suzanne Collins, tell the story of sacrificial love triumphing over evil intentions.

The Hunger Games universe is a dystopia set in Panem, a country consisting of the wealthy Capitol and 12 districts in varying states of poverty. Every year, children from the districts are chosen to participate in a compulsory annual televised death match called The Hunger Games.

¹ <https://sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources#resources>

At the outset, protagonist Katniss volunteers herself to take her sister's place in what seems like a suicide mission. More than once, while participating in the Games, she risks her life for her friends.

With fellow District 12 tribute, Peeta Mellark, the pair compete in the Games as a team. Katniss uses her knowledge of hunting and archery to survive, and the two become the victors after defying the Capitol's attempt to force one to kill the other.

Throughout the next two novels, *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay*, Katniss becomes a galvanizing symbol of rebellion against the oppressive Capitol.

Like the dystopia described in the apocalyptic literature of the Hunger Games, the book of Revelations expresses the dystopia of the Roman Empire, described as an oppressive and violent regime where gladiators had to fight until death to satisfy the multitude of the people in the circus.

In apocalyptic literature, the Roman world was so intractable that God has to intervene to destroy evil and establish a new and just world order.

This is the reason why in the conclusion of the book of Revelations, when God has destroyed all evil and the final judgment is complete, God recreates the cosmos. The sea, that symbol of danger and the home of the mythical monsters of the ancient civilizations is eliminated.

Perfection is described as a city in which God and humankind reside together. The old city and the Roman empire where people were oppressed, enslaved or reduced to things that could be sacrificed in the games is completely replaced by God's New Jerusalem.

God, who created the world at the beginning, now creates a new world at the end.

The reference to water of life suggests the importance of baptism among the Christian communities.

The book of Revelations expresses that our hope is in God, who promises to make all things new for the believing community. God's promises are always realized both now and in the future, and so, in some ways, we are already in the new Jerusalem, married to God, living without sorrow and death and, at the same time, we still live in this time and space.

The paradox is that at the same time death and sorrow are very real and affecting us every day but the power of the resurrection and love are also present.

We live in Christ the present and the future at the same time. The Kingdom is here now and not yet at the same time!

For this reason, we experience a movement of the Holy Spirit that is always bringing the good news of the new creation in Christ Jesus to us and to the world. Jesus is always equipping us for the tangible, daily reality of God making all things new. As Christ has made us new in love, we are the means by which that transforming love reaches all. Love becomes the defining feature of his disciples, so as Jesus's people will be known.

After we received the announcement that all is being new we- as a congregation and as individuals- need to imagine how this newness can be experienced.

What areas of our life and ministry as a church and our life as disciples of Jesus need to be enlivened as vehicles of our love?

What else might the God who is making all things new be calling us into?

Because God is making all things new in a dramatic fashion. The new creation

is here now and is acting recreating the world. The resurrection is manifesting its presence recreating the relationships and the society through the power of the living Spirit.

Jesus said in today's Gospel lesson:

²⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."²

The new commandment invites us to see the world differently and to see others differently.

That is why the new commandment that Jesus gave to the disciples to love each other is the concrete expression of how the new creation is revealing its presence on a daily basis.

The new creation is an act of the divine love for the world and the universe, and at the same time, the way we love and live in love are the manifestations of the presence of the new creation.

The new creation is the result of the action of the love of God, and the love of God is the way we reveal the presence of the new creation. Love is the source and the destiny of the creation. For this reason, Jesus said that he is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega, because he is the incarnation of the love of God and all that we can enjoy as the result of that love, so all that we can do now is to answer to that love living the power of the same divine love daily.

We experience the presence of the transformative power of the new creation when we love and live the commandment of love.

The commandment of love challenges our culture because we create boundaries, whether ethnically, politically or sexually, but those boundaries are meaningless before God, who can give to each and every person a repentance that leads to life. At the heart of every life, at the heart of community, is a daily dying and renewal, living out one's baptism.³

As walls and distinctions crumble, God reconciles the world to God's own self. "See, I make everything new." Repentance- that work of the Holy Spirit within each person- means living even more deeply into that reconciliation. At the baptismal font, in the liturgy that opens up worship, the newness that God creates- the reordering of life, the expansion of boundaries, the new commandment, the defeat of death and the repentance that leads to life are remembered and celebrated. Here the resurrection touches each of us in our daily life.⁴

It is very interesting that we can find hope and love, new creation and community, mercy and abundant grace in a book like the book of Revelations, a book that can shock and scare people with the horrible images of judgment, violence, suffering and war.

The book of Revelations has a language that expresses the violence and the suffering of the world to a generation of Christians that was experiencing that suffering and that violence.

³ Sundays and Seasons Preaching 2016, p. 151

⁴ Idem. P. 151

But at the same time, this book reveals the power of the transformative love of God that recreates the universe with that divine love.

Now that we see the transformative power of love in the middle of a violent and hostile world, and that we understand that the new commandment that Jesus gave us is the expression of that transformation, we can live our call as disciples in the middle of a conflictive and challenging society with the certitude that the violence around us has been defeated by the Lamb of God and that the new creation is a reality to be experienced and not only a metaphysical escapist utopia.

The transformative power of love is expressed in the new creation as the visible result of an invisible presence living in us. God is one with us according to the book of Revelations and we are united with God in an unbreakable bond:

“See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them”

In Revelation 21, people do not go to heaven as most people have been taught but rather God comes down to earth to dwell with mortals -- “the new Jerusalem descends from heaven,” and God makes a home among mortals (21:2-3). There is no prediction about the end times, no rapture and no punishment but God comes to be the home of humanity.⁵

This is one of the good news, heaven is not waiting for us at the end of our lives, heaven is a reality that comes now to us from God and starts as a powerful changing presence now.

⁵ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2842

The resurrection of Jesus has brought heaven back to earth in the message of God living in us and with us.

We can enjoy heaven right now and we will continue enjoying it after this world ends, because heaven is coming to us every day when we remember that God is in us and with us. We have this promise thanks to the resurrection of Jesus.

Every time that we live the commandment of love, every time that the love of God flows from us to others, in that very instant the presence of the New Jerusalem, the new creation and heaven are being manifested. In that very moment a taste of heaven is revealed, at this moment the temple of God and humanity is opening its doors.

We are invited to live this immense miracle of love, and when we do this, we are living heaven on earth. And when we manifest the presence of heaven on earth, we are elevating the earth to the new creation perspective that is here and now thanks to the resurrection.

Heaven is the new creation, the new creation is the result of the creative love of God, and we are the ones in charge to live, proclaim and enjoy this new creation from here until the eternity, heaven is here and heaven will be after.

May God bless us doing this mission.

He is risen.

He is risen indeed.