

Fifth Sunday of Easter – April 24, 2016
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

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Revelation 21:1-6 (NIV)

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2) I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3) And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4) 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." 5) **He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."** 6) 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 without cost from the spring of the water of life.

Dear fellow members of God's family:

New & Improved! It's hard to imagine two words which have been used more by advertisers in an attempt to stir up increased interest in their products. We've heard the words so often that they seem to have lost a great deal of their ability to catch our attention. Yet those words are some of the most appropriate words we could possibly use to describe what John saw in the vision he has written about in our text for today.

Previously John has written about the tribulations that will fill the earth until the day when Jesus returns to judge all people. At that time, all who followed the sinful ways of Satan and unbelief will be publicly condemned to spend eternity in the fires of hell with Satan and his angels. Those whose names have been recorded in the book of life – the believers will also be publicly judged. They will hear Jesus say to them: (Matthew 25:34 NIV) **"Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world."**

Our text for today is John's first glimpse of our eternal inheritance. John explains that:

Theme: Our God Makes All Things New

1. Our new home – created by him
2. Our new condition – prepared for him
3. Our new relationship – living with him
4. Our new life – happiness through him
5. Our new confidence – trusting him

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. The word "new" is repeated frequently in this text. The word has the connotation of "fresh or new in quality" or renewed. The Scriptures frequently speak of our eternal home as a new heaven and a new earth. The question that the Scriptures do not answer for us beyond a shadow of the doubt is whether or not they will be brand new or simply purged of all evil and sin and transformed or renewed to be like it was in its original state prior to the fall into sin.

It would be interesting to examine all of the various places in Scripture that speak about the new heavens and the new earth which we will enjoy in eternity. However, if we did that now we would not be able to consider the rest of this text. So let's just consider one verse from Romans which will help us to understand the concept of the new heaven and earth which the Lord will make for us.

The verse I have in mind is Romans 8:21 where Paul writes – **the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.** (NIV) Paul’s whole point is that our present suffering is insignificant when compared to the glory that is to come. (And that’s the same point that our text is making.) It’s hard to imagine then that Paul would use the example of creation to bolster his point if in fact the creation was simply going to be annihilated and replaced with another creation. It seems far more likely that Paul was looking for the restoration of the present creation to the state that existed prior to sin’s entry into the world.

The Scriptures teach us that our bodies will be renewed and restored to the image of God that was lost with the fall into sin. It seems likely that something similar will happen to our world. Really all that we need to know can be summed up in this sentence. God will destroy the earth as we know it now so we should not set our hopes on it.

John makes a rather interesting observation in our text about the perfect place where we will spend eternity. He says, “**there was no longer any sea.**” What does John mean? The answer to this question is difficult to determine with certainty because the book of Revelation abounds with imagery and symbolism as well as literal realities. Earlier in Revelation the sea was described as the place where the first beast came from. This beast was an agent and tool of Satan. The absence of the sea may simply be a way of saying that the new world will be free from any antichristian influences. (We know that this will be true, based on Scripture.)

It has also been pointed out that the sea at John’s time was often considered to be a source of danger and separation which was even feared by those who traveled upon it. The absence of the sea could be a way of saying that this type of fear and danger would be absent in the new heavens and the new earth. (Again, we know that this also will be the case on the basis of Scripture.)

Finally, it may be possible that John is simply telling us that there may not be any large visible bodies of water in the new heavens and the new earth. No matter which of these views we might accept our conclusions will be the same. The new place the Lord is creating for us is going to be a place of beauty and peace, the likes of which we have not yet known. This is an encouraging truth for those of us who are involved in fighting the good fight of faith and who are looking forward to the end of this present evil age.

Not only is God creating a new home for us, he will also provide us with a new condition prepared for him. **I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.**

The terms the “Holy City” & the “new Jerusalem” are terms used to describe the presence of God with his people. Here John is speaking of the Holy Christian Church. John appears to be using some figurative language to describe what the Apostle Paul wrote about the second coming in a more literal way: (1 Thessalonians 4:14 NIV) **We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.**

John’s description of the church as a bride beautifully dressed for husband reminds of Paul’s description of the church as the bride of Christ in Ephesians 5. There Paul tells us how we will be prepared to live with Christ – our heavenly bridegroom. It is clear that the preparations are not of our own making – but that they are God’s gift to us. (Ephesians 5:25-27 NIV) ... **Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26) to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27) and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.**

It is only through the washing of faith in Jesus sacrificial life and death that we are prepared to live in the new home God is making for us. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all unrighteousness. We rejoice with Isaiah who proclaimed: (Isaiah 61:10 NIV) **I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, ... as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.**

In anticipation of eternity, when we will live with the Lord with glorified bodies, free from sin and its effects, the Apostle Paul reminds us: (Ephesians 4:22-24 NIV) **You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23) to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24) and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.**

A new home created by God for us, a new condition prepared by God for us – now John records a message directly from God describing a new relationship we will enjoy in eternity: living with God.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."

It is certainly true that God is always with us already now – but in our heavenly home, we enjoy an even more blessed relationship with him. There was a time when the Lord Jesus lived on this earth and his disciples could see him. That changed following Jesus ascension. Now you and I walk by faith: confident the Lord is with us, watching over us, providing for us, keeping us safe. In his high priestly prayer, spoken the night of his betrayal Jesus prayed that **all believers may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.** (cf. John 17:21)

Here on this earth our sins and our sorrows make our unity with God less than crystal clear to us. (1 Corinthians 13:12 NIV) **For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.** In heaven, this unclarity will be removed. There we will behold God's presence with our own eyes. As the psalmist reminds us: **We will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**

We will be his people and he will be our God. However, isn't that the case already? It surely is! Once again, the rest of Scripture helps us to understand what John has in mind with these words. In his first epistle John writes: (1 John 3:2 NIV) **Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.** At that time it will be clear to all that the believers are truly God's children. Now the world wonders – especially when God's children are allowed to suffer. But, on the day of judgment God's children will be revealed for who they are and for what they.

This new relationship with God is ours through faith in Christ Jesus who removed the barriers of sin so that we can live with God forever enjoying a perfect fellowship with him and enjoying a new life of happiness through him. **He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.**

With this verse, John gives us a bit of a description of what our new life will be like. Since it is impossible to describe something that we cannot imagine such as the absence of sin and its effects in positive terms, John tells us what will not be a part of our new life. One thing that will be missing will be tears. Here our tears are often the result of our unclear understanding of God's will. There we will be changed so that our will is in perfect agreement with God's will.

Everything that causes us sorrow in this life will be gone and removed. The things that cause us to mourn and sorrow including death are a present reality in this lifetime. We live in a world touched by tragedy and sorrows. In the life to come all of these types of things (which are the result of the fall into sin) will be behind us. They are part of the old order of things that will have passed away. The fact that God really loves his people and is concerned about them and that he desired and planned their salvation and redemption will be completely assured with the destruction of death itself. The story of man's redemption began when man fell into sin and brought the curse of death into the world. That story will be complete, when there is no death for the child of God.

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." 6) He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.

These are the words of Jesus himself. Jesus himself assures us that what John has heard, seen, and described will take place. He's the one who is in charge of making it all happen. In fact, even now he's making it happen. The one who had promised his disciples that he was going to prepare a place for them is guiding and controlling everything in history exactly as John has seen it and described it in the book of Revelations. We can count on it all happening including our life with God in the new home with the new conditions and new happiness because Jesus' words give us a new confidence. What John has recorded isn't just a guess of what the future has in store for us – it is the trustworthy and reliable word of our Lord and Savior. These words fill us with hope in times of great tribulation. The tears of God's people will surely be wiped away and death and pain and sorrow will come to an end. In fact, Jesus tells John: It is done. As far as Jesus is concerned all these things are as good as done. You and I are still bound by time – but Jesus is the eternal one – the beginning and the end – he lives in a timeless state – each day is today with him. It's no wonder he says all this is done!

Because Jesus says it is so we can count on the fact that God is making all things new for us. We can be certain it will be new and improved. What joy, confidence and hope for our futures these words hold out to us. It's no wonder we love to sing:

I'm but a stranger here; Heav'n is my home.
Earth is a desert drear; Heav'n is my home.
Danger and sorrow stand Round me on ev'ry hand.
Heav'n is my fatherland; Heav'n is my home.

What though the tempest rage, Heav'n is my home.
Short is my pilgrimage; Heav'n is my home.
And time's wild, wintry blast Soon shall be overpast;
I shall reach home at last; Heav'n is my home.

There at my Savior's side -- Heav'n is my home.--
I shall be glorified; Heav'n is my home.
There are the good and blest, Those I love most and best,
And there, I, too, shall rest; Heav'n is my home.

Therefore I murmur not; Heav'n is my home.
Whate'er my earthly lot, Heav'n is my home.
And I shall surely stand There at my Lord's right hand.
Heav'n is my Fatherland; Heav'n is my home. Amen.