

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Fifth Sunday in Easter: May 15, 2022

“The New World”

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Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church on the fifth Sunday in Easter. Today I have decided to take the “scripture less traveled” so to speak. I want to explore our reading from Revelation today.

This particular scripture is one of the readings recommended at funerals and memorials as it is an attempt to bring an image of heaven to the mourner’s mind and therefore comfort. And while that representation may be appropriate, and probably even preferred, I like to look a little deeper into this reading.

I am sure most of you are aware of the news, and if you are older than twenty, you know there has been a very strange shift happening in the world. Some of the very things we held fast to are now obsolete. There is war; there continues to be poverty; the pandemic rages on; and there are many other concerns that we know all too well.

I want to believe that today’s reading is here for us (on a weekend with a full moon, and a lunar eclipse, not to mention Mercury retrograde) to show us there is hope. What if these times we are in are the darkest, as the saying goes, “the darkest before the dawn?” What if the world and the earth are going through the dark night of the soul?

There is no prediction about the end times, in these readings: no rapture and no punishment. But instead God comes to be present in the home of humanity. This interpretation of Revelation 21 is very complex to the world of academic scholarship because most of what we have heard about Revelation goes against our contemporary world of predicting the **end** of the world.

While Jerusalem is the focus of Jewish identity, faith, and hope, in Revelation Jerusalem signifies “the election of a new people and the sealing of a new covenant.” Theologically, chapter 21 claims a new creation: one in which God Himself will have His hand upon humanity and it will be a home like no other.

The poignancy of this reading is that the new creation is framed by God’s direct speech, “See, I am making all things new.” God’s new creation must replace this deadly, torn, raped, angry, sick, evil, revengeful, hurtful, and painful world (did I get all of it in?) The church is called to make a choice. The church is called to be on the side of God and to be part of the new creation.

This is a world where zip codes, personal beliefs, gender, orientation, and any other -ism, do not divide people but instead this is a place where all God’s people have access to every area, including access to health care, education, transportation, housing, worship, and authentic life.

And you may think that your part in this creating or bringing about the kingdom of God is too small to be noticed. Yet we see and experience the benefits of prayer, the generosity of our congregation within the community, and our ability to help each other, every day.

The Dali Lama says, “Much of the future of the planet and what is happening is in our hands. Peace is an idealized version of where we could be. But, if peace is to be sustainable, it has to come from within.”

One of the best ways to combat the current state of the world, is through changing the way that we look at ourselves. We can't give what we don't have. If we don't love ourselves, we **won't** have compassion and love to give others. If we cannot forgive ourselves, we **cannot** forgive others. If we cannot find peace, how can the world expect to find it?

Jesus throughout his ministry emphasized the vast difference between the way God views things compared to our limited human thoughts. If we can not imagine happiness, how can we pray for it, because then how could we even expect it?

But if I find a moment of happiness or joy, and feel that feeling, I know what I am praying for. That applies to gratitude, peace, or whatever you feel called to pray for in this world of needs. Now is the time to cultivate in yourself that which you would like others to experience. This is the true meaning of "love your neighbor as yourself". You must begin with yourself.

Any participation you make in the world, make with good intention. Put yourself in the place of whatever you are being asked to take part in. Don't waste your time or money on schemes, or where it could be used better elsewhere.

You and I may never see the world as described here in Revelation - where there is no more pain or death, tears or mourning. But we can start by allowing the love of God into ourselves through prayer. If we find it for ourselves, we can begin to imagine that world, so that we can birth it into reality. But most of all, we can take

our own experience of God's love and peace and then begin sharing it with those we meet.

When we come to the Communion table today, take a moment to reflect on your intentions, your thoughts, your prayers. Allow God in to feed you body and soul. To share the abundance of spiritual grace, so that you are strengthened and contain that mystery that allows us to continue to pray, to work and to serve creation. To feed on God, the creator itself, within your hearts with thanksgiving. To let the grace you receive be so abundant that it is available to others you interact with.

We are in trying times, and we look in faith to ancient scriptures that are inspired by God. Yes, these words have been edited, redacted, and retranslated, but yet should be taken very seriously and considered a vibrant way to connect with the Divine. This scripture, regardless of its imperfections or strange it may be, holds truth beyond what we can understand. However, it does speak to our humanity which tends to repeat its own history as we continue to struggle to heal ourselves and the world.

We can hold the hope and realize a very interesting discovery. In the first book of the Bible we have the creation, God spoke the *Word* and the world was created. And in the last book presented - Revelation, God speaks again and we have the new creation. Always the cycle of life - containing the shadow of death, but never an end; rather always the promise of everlasting life. Amen