



Resurgence: Creation

Revelation 21:1-6

Rev. Lindsey Baynham

Washington Street UMC

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I love spring.

After a time of barren trees, cold air, wintery mixes and the color brown dominating the landscape of the earth, I'm more than ready for the budding green signifying life. Animals reemerge and birds begin their choral arrangements each morning. Apart from lots of pollen, spring is a sign of all that is new and restored in this season.

I went away for a few days for a work trip and when I returned, I came back to a different yard at my house. The tree in my front yard had grown all its leaves back, the grass was growing tall, and flowers beginning to bloom.

I love how spring appears suddenly—as if it's a surprise each year, showing off the beauty of creation. But if I were to take a step back, and think about **all** of creation—I do not have the same warm and fuzzy feeling as I've just described to you.

If I ponder the 'state of things'—to be honest, I become greatly overwhelmed. Pollution, energy supplies, access to fresh water, weapons, toxic pollution, access to food and the human condition all give me pause as to whether anything is *really* being made new. And we have become "used to it", desensitized saying "Oh, that's global warming" or "Oh, another [fill in the blank]".

Over time we seem to have lost the intimate connection we have to creation.

Throughout scripture we hear and sense the magnitude of all that creation entails. Not only the grass and animals, but humankind—relationships and communities. So, when creation [all of creation] groans, with, as the Apostle Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, "sighs too deep for words", these verses from the Revelation to John, challenge our understanding and beg the question, how does this tremendous gift from God [creation] impact our lives? In the midst of turmoil and terror, brokenness and pain, oldness and deterioration—where do we find newness and promise?

You all have been journeying through stories in scripture highlighting how an encounter with the risen Christ leads to a resurgence of life and faith. Mary Magdalene at the tomb seeing the risen Christ for the first time through a curtain of tears. Thomas' recognition of the risen Christ, Jesus appearing to the disciples while making some breakfast, and Tabitha brought back to life.

This morning we encounter the risen Christ in the futuristic revelation to John.

We are often reticent to consider the book of Revelation as having good news, as being one of promise. This "book end" often gets a 'bad rap'.

There tends to be a focus on the doom and gloom, destruction, future realities and warring strife. Indeed there are particular passages that are lifted up as hopeful and promising, like the one we read today, but the scriptures of Revelation are too easily categorized as confusing or scary or irrelevant. Friends, there is something to be heard hear today.

In chapter 21 we find ourselves at the culmination and climax of the book. The images of battles, dragons, those robed in white, boisterous choirs, a lamb, a throne and more have all led to this point of immense clarity and a grand reveal. Suddenly from the sky, a breathtaking city begins to lower.

“Then I 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. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...”¹

This triumphal entry of the holy city, descending from heaven to earth is the pinnacle moment in this apocalyptic drama. The former is no longer and the new is here.

In this season of newness, irony would have it; this passage is often read at funerals—and today as we celebrate a baptism. But I find that what God is doing at the very core of creation through this revelation, has a lot to say about communities of faith, life and death, chaos and order, despair and hope.

If we flip to the very beginning, when the Spirit hovered over the waters and all things—light/dark, day/night, sky/land, waters, animals, and humankind—came into being. From chaos, God’s voiced pierced the air to bring order, and to bring a covenant between creation as well as with us.

We’re familiar with the rest of the story. From the moment Adam & Eve are sent away from the garden, God begins the effort of restoring and seeking to reconcile all things. Connecting, abiding with and dwelling among the people through kings, judges, prophets, women and unlikely characters. Then a baby, a king is born.

When we hear about God coming to dwell in Revelation 21 we, as Easter people, resurrection people, have come to know that this is not the first time God has “moved into the neighborhood”² as Eugene Peterson describes, not the first time God has come to dwell and live among creation. We are witnesses to the transformational reality that in Christ, God did “not destroy the old, but rather changed it”³. In Christ we find the humanity and divinity of God, in flesh, with us. In Christ, we are invited to share in his life, death and resurrection—dying to self and being raised with Christ that we might know more fully the love and light of God.

And so, Revelation is a fuller promise of God’s home and tabernacle coming to dwell with the people.

¹ Revelation 21:1-2 NRSV

² John 1 The Message

³ GK Beale

The resurgence we proclaim in Christ and in creation, is the affirmation that God is not just making new things but rather, God is making all things new.

There's a difference.

God gleans and gathers all things in order to create new life through the risen Christ and what is/will be revealed. The apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians that “anyone who is in Christ, is a new creation. The old has passed away and everything has become new.” God is infusing a resurrection spirit into creation, restoring it and therefore creating in us a sense of wonder to all that is new.

“And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Then 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.”

Here we find what was, what is and what will be. We encounter the magnitude and allow ourselves to be curious of what is to come. At the beginning was God and at the end is the beginning, with God in the midst of it all.

God is not off in the distance, here. This hope found in the scripture today is not some “pie in the sky, sweet bye and bye” hope. Just as God walked through the garden in the verses of Genesis, so too God has journeyed among us through salvation history, to the end where something like we could never have imagined will be made known. And where is God? Living among us.

In the final chapters of one of my favorite works of literature, the main character faces his arch nemesis. All around him: destruction, betrayal, war and pain. It seems that what he has always known, is broken. In one scene in particular, an insight is revealed to him. It comes from an item that has been with him along the journey and in a moment of muscle memory, the message comes “I open at the close.” It becomes clear what he must do and that in dying to self in a way, new life can come. A new story, the ultimate defeat of evil and death.

It seems, in Revelation, at the close of sorts, our eyes and lives are open to what God is doing through a new heaven and a new earth. The old has passed away and Look! God is making all things new. And we have the joy of living each day into the newness of life written here. The revival of faith and fullness of life.

I love how author and pastor Janet Hunt articulates this reality, **“To be sure, nothing this side of what God will one day do as promised through the words of John in Revelation will likely completely capture and surely not fulfill what we imagine that new heaven and earth will be.** [But] We get a sense, from time to time, of the nearness of God dwelling with us.”

God is making all things new. You see? Good news. In the midst of creation and creating, God is seeking to restore and bring about the kingdom, wanting us to be a part of it.

There is almost always brokenness in, around, and under even the very best we see and experience now. Even so? What we experience of the risen Christ, the Lord over all creation now is but a taste of what is still to come.

Our task and invitation is to consider how creation is a daily reminder of God's gift of life. The words of this revelation encourage us to engage with the love of God springing forth. While the city comes from heaven, we are still participating in God's good work of restoring all of creation to right relationship. It is not all left to some "end times" miracle. Every day is living in the joyous tension of the already, and the not yet. May we be willing to accept this gift and this promise.

In the name of the One who creates, redeems and sustains us all. Amen.