

Easter 6 Year C: 25 / 26 May 2019
St. James' Episcopal Church, Clinton NY
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“What the protagonist sees is God’s dwelling place being in the midst of creation, and the ramification of this revelation is plentiful, for that is the nature of the Incarnation itself. Thus Christ, the Lamb of God, is where the manifestation of this indwelling is incarnated in Jesus who embodies for us the intertwining of divinity and humanity, thus redeeming and sanctifying all creation.”

Acts 16: 9-15

Revelation 21: 10, 22- 22: 5

John 14: 23-29

Psalm 67: 1-2, 4, 6-7

Probably one of the most, if not the most, maligned pieces of sacred writing is the Book of Revelation. Of all the texts in the Christian Canon, Revelation is not only misunderstood, it is well-meaningly misappropriated. Many in the Christian household read Revelation as a portent, a harbinger of things yet to come. They mine the text, sifting through its words, seeking a means of understanding what is happening in order to ascertain what is coming to pass. All of this is an effort to prepare themselves for the *Parousia* – the second coming of Christ. They wait in anticipation of Christ’s return trying in the interim to discover when the precise moment will be. Sadly, maybe even unfortunately, I believe they are misusing – possibly wasting – their time.

The author of Revelation’s writing is focused less on what is going to happen and more about what is happening. Revelation is a social, political, and religious critique of its time in light of Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension. It is an attempt to understand the Christ Mystery in context to its era. The Book of Revelation specifically addresses seven churches as they seek to live the message of Christ Jesus while existing in the midst of the Roman Empire with its ongoing suppression of this young religious movement that professes a subversive

message of faith, hope, and love. Three key ingredients for establishing God's reign of righteousness, justice, and peace.

Rather than a prognostication, Revelation is just what its title suggests: a revealing. A pulling back of the veil on God's work in the world through Christ, personified as Light and incarnated in Jesus. As the gospler of John writes: Jesus says to his followers this – "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (Jn. 8.12) This interplay between light and dark continues a motif found throughout scripture, established particularly in John's gospel. Light is not so much so we can see, but rather so it can reflect and reveal what is there. Light reflects and reveals what is there. It is not a question of good and evil, right or wrong. Rather it is about realizing Jesus as God's eschatological agent who ushers in God's reign. That is to say a final judgment where creation is held accountable before its Creator. At least that's what we've been taught. That's what the institution, as church, a product and tool of Empire – whether Roman, British, American – wants us to believe. But that is not what the preexistent *Logos* is about.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (Jn. 1.1) That is what the light reveals as the veil of darkness is pulled away and to what the ending chapters of Revelation address as the protagonist sees the new Jerusalem. A city that personifies God's tabernacle, the dwelling place of the Holy of Holies. And it is not in some extraterrestrial sphere or astral-plane of existence. It doesn't descend from the sky as some kind of spaceship nor does Jesus glide down from the heavens on a hover craft disguised as a cloud. What the protagonist sees is God's dwelling place *being in the midst* of creation, and the ramification of this revelation is plentiful, for that is the nature of the Incarnation itself. Thus Christ, the Lamb of God, is where the manifestation of this indwelling is incarnated in Jesus who embodies for us the intertwining of divinity and humanity, thus redeeming and sanctifying all creation. That is the light that shines in the darkness and to which the darkness cannot overcome it. (Jn. 1.5) That is a Truth that cannot be hidden away.

We cannot leave here today untouched by this revelation where God is not out there somewhere, but is here, in our heart, in the heart of creation. The New Jerusalem dwells amongst us and within us; within all creation. The sacred and created are one. There is no

longer need of church, synagogue, mosque, or temple to contain the Holy of Holies, for the Holy of Holies lies within. Therefore, we can no longer remain blind to how our actions impact the environment. No longer can we treat the land and the oceans and the creatures that live within and upon them as commodities to exploit for profit. No longer can we remain indifferent to the plight of the downtrodden and marginalized. How we treat the stranger matters, for God dwells within them. How we treat the immigrant, the refugee matters for they bear the sacred within. How we treat those who differ from us according to their ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religious affiliation matters for God dwells in the heart of all.

From this understanding, I would argue that the Book of Revelation is less about end-times and more about new beginnings. If Genesis is the book of beginnings, Revelation is *the* book of new beginnings in Christ Jesus where reconciliation fosters relationship such that the sacred and the mundane indwell with one another. Now before you say this is a radical idea, it really isn't as novel as it may sound. Athanasius (296-373 CE), one of the early church fathers who lived during the Patristic period of the Church (100 till ca.450 CE) wrote the following: "God was consistent in working through one man [Jesus] to reveal [God's Self] everywhere, as well as through the other parts of [God's] creation, so that nothing was left devoid of [God's] Divinity and [God's] self-knowledge . . . so that the whole universe was filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters fill the sea." God . . . working through Jesus to reveal God's Self everywhere!

This indwelling, this New Jerusalem that the protagonist sees as the Book of Revelation concludes reminds us that we do not need to look for signs of a future event. Rather, we must embrace this revelation that God dwells with us, that Christ is among us as we gather, fashioning us into the incarnate Body of Christ this day. On this sixth Sunday of Easter, our readings are summarized succinctly in Paul's writing, especially to the Church at Corinth.

Writing nearly two generations before either Revelation or John's Gospel is scribed, Paul, writing to the Corinthians says this: "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has

passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” (2 Cor. 5.16-20)

That is our marching order: we are ambassadors for Christ. Therefore, let us go forth this day as such – as ambassadors for Christ – carrying the Light of truth: that God dwells within us and all creation: redeeming, sanctifying and thus blessing all through Christ.

Alleluia! Amen!