

“God, the Main Character”

May 22, 2022
King City United Church
York United Ministries
Rev. Andrew K. Lee

Prayer for Illumination

O God of promise, your word made flesh in Jesus Christ is trustworthy and true. By the power of your Holy Spirit, may it rise up in us this day, like a gift from the spring of the water of life to refresh our thirsty souls. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Psalm 148 (#871 VU - select verses)

Refrain: Let the whole cre-a-tion cry, 'Glo-ry be to God on high.'

Praise God from the heavens; give praise in the heights!

Give praise, all you angels; praise God, all you hosts!

Praise God, sun and moon; give praise, stars and lights!

Praise God, farthest heavens, and all waters beyond heaven! R

Let all things praise the name of God,

the name above every other, whose splendour covers heaven and earth.

You give strength to your people,

songs of praise to your faithful,

to Israel, the people dear to your heart. R

Revelation 21:1-6

¹Then 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. 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 and be their God; 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."⁶ 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.

This is the word of God

Thanks be to God.

<Reflection>

When it comes to preaching, preachers have a common preference for selecting Bible passages to preach. At the same time, preachers may hesitate to preach on the Book of Revelation; however, today's passage from Revelation is well received by both preachers and congregations. "A new heaven and earth"; "they will be God's people"; "he will wipe every tear from their eyes"; "I am the Alpha and the Omega" I believe that you've heard these words of God from the Bible or somewhere else for a long time. I often choose this passage not in my sermon but in funeral services. "God will wipe every tear from their eyes": These are the right words of consolation for the family who lost their loved ones. As I said, I've used it and will use it when necessary. But, besides the ritual usage of this passage in the funeral service, I felt we Christians and myself have easily skipped the deeper reflection because it is so frequently used.

But now, today, I must say that it is my joy to share what I reflected on it. Revelation is, as you know, written by John the Apostle. And the passage of chapter 21 that we read is the first passage of the conclusion of the book, and the next chapter, chapter 22, the last chapter of Revelation, accordingly the last chapter of the canon Bible that we are using, is the explanation of today's passage. So today's passage is the gist of the conclusion of the Book of Revelation. John the Apostle was in the vision and wrote what he saw. In this respect, here, in verse 1, "I" means not God, not Jesus, but John the Apostle. He says, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth." I can't imagine what the new heaven and the new earth look like. But he says they are new ones. First, I have to point out a pitfall in the English language. It is about the word "new." Is new good? Sometimes no, but mostly yes, good. New clothes for spring, new shoes, newly paved roads, new computers, new places to go, new food to taste, a new hospital in my town, etc. "New" is good, and that connotation of goodness can also be applied to the phrase "a new heaven and a new earth."

And this phrase has been used several times in the Bible. Isaiah 65:17 says, "I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind." And 2 Peter 3:13 says, "¹³ But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home." John the Apostle takes the existing phrase

to describe what he saw. However, the word "new" here employs a particular word, "*καινοσ*" which means new in quality. It's not about a pair of new shoes, but new heaven and earth in quality. I do not know what they are; we can only imagine the beauty and newness of the universe.

Then, the second point comes; why do we need the new heaven and earth? Are the present heaven and earth not good enough? From biblical perspectives, the earth and the sea are the battlefields of good and evil. And the last chapters of Revelation declare the total victory over death, over the Roman Empire and over the evil power. The ultimate conclusion of God's Heaven and earth should be transformed into a new heaven and earth in quality to accomplish God's Providence towards the universe.

We need to understand the vision of a new heaven and earth at least in three dimensions; individual, theological, and cosmological. John the Apostle clearly sends the message to the churches, and the core message is the divine subversive victory over the power and death. And modern Christians theologically read this message of God as our resurrection, victory, hope, and restoration that God promised. It is not a story of somewhere over the rainbow but a story of our present consolation and future eternal life that God promised. The cosmological dimension goes with eco-theological visions of life-giving power, which is one of our new generations' agendas. I can't explain them right now, but I will unfold them throughout the church ministry. The point is, it would be incomplete when we interpret it only in an individual dimension.

Now let me finally bring the famous last verses. A loud voice from the throne, we assume that it is an angel's voice, saying;

"... he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first ones (that is, the first heaven and earth) have passed away."¹

And God says, "I am making all things new... It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End."² In God's notion, which word do

¹ Revelation 21:4.

² Revelation 21:6a.

you think is the most important? I'll reread it: "I am making all things new... It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End."

I want to recall my very previous sermon. I elaborated on the two encounters that Paul experienced. He met the resurrected Jesus and Ananias, one of Jesus' disciples who lived in the city of Damascus. Here, we shared our wisdom that if we make the two encounters into a film, God would be the film's main character. Without God, Paul wouldn't meet the resurrected Jesus and his disciple Ananias. God arranged all the encounters, and all Paul did was just respond. Here again, the same story goes. Who is the main character of today's passage? Who creates the new heaven and earth? Who makes all things new? Who started life in the universe? Who finishes all these things? Who is the Alpha, and who is the Omega? Yes, it's God. God started, God has done, God will make all things new, and God will make all things, including nature and the life in the universe. This is God's world, and we are the responders. We should make this clearer than ever.

Brothers and sisters and friends, we know that we are creatures, not the creator. We know this. Now we recall this, we assure this, and we confirm this: we are creatures, not the creator, so life is a gift from God, and God thankfully chooses us. This faith has power: why and how? When we confirm that we are creatures, we are liberated from our deceiving burdens. When we admit that we are sinners, we are delivered from our distorted self-criticism. When we acknowledge that God is the Alpha and the Omega, we are invited to celebrate spiritual freedom in life and beyond. We are creatures, not the creator. We are responders, not the master. We are receiving life from God. This humble heart changes all things around you. This grateful heart transforms all things in you. And this loving heart listens to and responds to God's gentle voice.

Let us pray:

"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."
Oh God, let this be done in me and on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.