

## There's No Place Like Home

[Text - Revelation 21:1-6]

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Each Sunday during this Easter Season, a reading from *Revelation* is listed in our lectionary of suggested Scripture texts. Every Sunday, except today, I've opted to pass on those readings. In part, it's because when I read about the golden streets and emerald throne room, with its flashing fire, billowing smoke and flying creatures, I get this strange feeling that we're not in Kansas anymore! And the fact that *Revelation* is one of the most difficult books of the Bible to interpret, doesn't help matters. Its cryptic language, the symbolic use of strange animals and objects, colors and numbers - makes it an extremely tough read. And the subject matter certainly doesn't make it any easier. *Revelation* describes some truly disturbing times - when followers of Christ are being persecuted and executed by the Roman Empire. And it tells about even worse times to come - when the entire *world* will be shaken by plagues and pestilence, tribulations and terror.

So why take-on this reading from *Revelation* this morning? First of all, because today's passage stands in sharp contrast to many of the others found in *Revelation* - the ones often used by contemporary writers to promote fear and hostility, divisiveness and an unhealthy sense of doom and gloom. For though *Revelation* was written to encourage First Century Christians who were facing genuine persecution, it's often misused to encourage Twenty-first Century Christians to see themselves as oppressed victims. Last Saturday, in his commencement address at Jerry Falwell's Liberty University, Mike Pence warned the students that they may be "shunned or ridiculed for defending the teachings of the Bible". Pence seems to be confusing the slight reduction of our centuries-long white protestant *privilege*, with actual *persecution*. "Sure it was tough for those early Christians to be fed to the *lions* at the Roman Colosseum; but I'm being persecuted for boldly refusing to bake a cake to be fed to the *gays* at their wedding! So who's the *real* martyr?" Just because so-called "evangelicals" are finally getting some push-back for the ways they seek to oppress others [like gays, Muslims, Jews, and women] doesn't mean that they themselves are being oppressed!

The Book of Revelation has also been misused to spin-off a series of books which advance the notion that only a small and special contingency of "true believers" will be saved - "true believers" basically being those who buy-into that particular brand of B.S....*Bible Study!* Meanwhile, the billions of people on this planet who haven't heard or embraced this particular convoluted, end-of-the-world theology, are portrayed as being completely depraved; and will deservedly be afflicted with unspeakable plagues and suffering, devastation and eternal damnation.

Now, while there are a couple places in *Revelation* that allude to the *few* who will be saved, there are other passages which describe the *infinite* number of people who end up rejoicing in the Holy One's Eternal Presence - people "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages!" More importantly, the remarkable tenderness which

the Holy One displays at the book's conclusion, completely contradicts the idea that God would treat billions of God's children with utter contempt and cruelty. This wonderfully compassionate vision from this morning's passage, certainly calls into question those earlier images of a brutal and destructive deity: "For God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more... To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the Water of Life."

The essential message in the book of *Revelation*, when seen in its historical context and in light of the entire message of Jesus Christ, is that when all is said and done, Divine Love will ultimately triumph! And Christ's Reign of Peace and Justice, Life and Love will overcome the tyranny of bigotry and violence, hatred and fear, and even death itself. That's what the book of *Revelation* is really all about once you work-through the mysterious language and bizarre visions. It's a revelation of the Holy One's abiding love for people of all times and places - particularly people who are facing genuine difficulties and dangers, pain and loss.

This is the other reason I decided to tackle this text from *Revelation* this morning. Far too many of the popular books on *Revelation* obsessively focus on futuristic, fantasized troubles and tribulations. Yet the truth is, you and I don't need to speculate about problems and afflictions that may or may not happen; because our present world has more than enough pain and suffering with which to deal. We live in a world where innocent men, women, and children are maimed and killed by military bombings and terrorist attacks every day. We live in a country where political lying and corporate corruption are routinely overlooked, or even rewarded. We live in a county where far too many people are caught in a cycle of poverty and violence, economic and racial inequality. And right here, in this sanctuary, there are people among us who carry the burden of illness or loneliness, loss or grief. So while the book of *Revelation* *can* serve to remind us about Life's pain and struggles, just keeping our eyes and ears open can do the same. However, *Revelation* doesn't necessarily serve as an effective call to action, particularly when it's misused as a vehicle to encourage people to fixate on their paralyzing fears about catastrophic events yet to come. Fortunately, our calling as followers of Christ isn't to speculate about who the anti-Christ might be, but to contemplate on who the Christ actually was; what Christ does; and what Christ calls you and me to do in *response* to the pain and trouble around us.

Tempting though it may be to fantasize about a glorious realm Somewhere Over the Rainbow, the reality is that you and I live right here and right now! Every Sunday, we pray together that God's Realm will come and God's Will be done, "on earth as it is in heaven." And every day, you and I are given the opportunity to help create that heaven on earth - by helping those who are hurting - by feeding the hungry and standing-up for the oppressed - by sharing the burdens and the joys of those around us - and by sharing with others the *Good* News of Divine Life and Love. In the Christian Faith, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the ultimate sign of Life and Love; because it shows us that even when the powers of corrupt empire, false religion, fear, hatred and death have done their worst, the power of Divine Love will still prevail. This is the *Good* News of Jesus Christ!

