

Revelation 21:1-4

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost (Series B, Proper 14)

Lessons for the Day: 1 Kings 19:1-8; Ephesians 4:17-5:2; John 6:35-51**All Things New**

August 12, 2018

“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, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.””

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

In the myriad of cable channels is one known as HGTV. The popular shows on the network include things like *Holmes on Homes* or whatever the current version is; *From Worst to First* and *Love it or Flip It*. All these shows focus on the same basic idea: there are houses that aren't everything they could be, but if you get the right contractor, designer and financing, you can turn something less than ideal into a home of which you can be proud.

Of course, sometimes the only thing you can do is totally demolish the old, unstable, rotten and the unsafe, and start all over. That's what John sees in our text today. He sees a new heaven, a new earth, and a new Jerusalem. Everything has to be new, because all the old, rotten and corrupt things of this world must come to an end. All the *former things have passed away*. Now God establishes what is pure and clean and perfect—perhaps a variation of the world that God created at the beginning, when *“God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.”* (Genesis 1:31, ESV)

The last two chapters of the Bible give us a wonderful glimpse into all that God has prepared for His people. What we need to remember, especially in these days, is that God has great and glorious things in store for us. He has a wonderful life prepared, greater than anything we can think or imagine now.

When we were going through our Revelation bible study, there were questions on what this new heaven and new earth will be like. God declares, *“Behold, I am making all things new.”* Also he said, *“Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”* (Revelation 21:5, ESV) John sees that new heaven and new earth. What exactly this was, John doesn't tell us. Maybe he couldn't even grasp it all himself. But one thing is clear—God has to make it all new. Let's face it, the world that we are living in, in spite of all the beauty and majesty that our God created here, is still a fallen world. Over a year ago, we had a foot of sewage flood our newly renovated basement. Only weeks before, we were admiring the way that the empty space and bare concrete walls and floor had been transformed into a livable space, complete with my office, a little rec room and improved storage. All that changed in one evening. Suddenly the freshly painted walls and new flooring and carpeting were soiled and polluted by the raw sewage that filled the basement. Some of my books and office equipment were destroyed. The new couch smelled and was stained beyond repair. There was nothing to do, but to pull out all the contaminated material and start over. The work involved cleaning what could be cleaned, and only the bottom 2 feet of drywall and insulation were removed. The restoration company saved what could be saved, but there was more loss than rescue, when it came right down to it.

The perfect world that God created was affected in an even worse way by sin. When we look to the end, we really have to go back to the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth. They were beautiful, glorious, and holy. But everything changed when sin entered the world. One simple act of disobedience changed man's relationship with God; it changed Adam and Eve's relationship with each other; it changed the whole created world. Worse than sewage, sin contaminated everything—everything—that God had made. Paul reminds us: *“For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”* (Romans 8:20-21, ESV) Now we see a world filled with death and destruction and decay. We see sorrow and sadness and sickness. We see the affects of sin in our hearts and in our lives. We lost so many things in our flood, because sewage gets into everything. It contaminated it with bacteria and disease. Our world is far worse off because of sin. The only thing to be done is to get rid of all the bad and start fresh.

God had promised through the prophet Isaiah: *“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem*

to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness.” (Isaiah 65:17–18, ESV) Now John is given a revelation of the end. He sees the spoiler, if you will; the way the story of God’s redemption ends. It ends with God making all things new. We may wonder what it will all be like. We may wonder where it will be—does the new earth simply take the place of the old earth? Will it be big enough? Will the continents be the same? What about that new Jerusalem? Is it like the city that we know?

John doesn’t reveal any of this. God doesn’t need us to worry about it. All we need to know is that the former things—the painful, sinful, hurtful things of this world have passed away.

When the Lord told Isaiah what was coming, He also told him what that new heaven and earth would be like: *“No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them. Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,” says the LORD.*” (Isaiah 65:20–25, ESV)

That description takes us back to life as it was in the Garden of Eden. Maybe the whole earth will be Eden. Our seasons will not exist. No heat waves; no freezing temperatures. In this new heaven and new earth God *will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.*

That’s what really matters—that God gets rid of sin and its horrible consequences in our lives, in our world, in our future. God does more than renovate or upgrade. He makes it all new. I did like the fact that someone noted that God makes all things new. He doesn’t say He makes all new things. You will still be you, but the contamination of sin is gone. The world will still be the world. Will we live here or in heaven? Does it really matter? What does matter is what God promises: *“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”*

This wonderful renovation is already underway. It began when God promised Adam and Eve that He would destroy the works of the serpent. It is seen in the major construction that took place when a cross was raised on that hill called Golgatha, as the sinless Son of God, who has taken on our flesh, was crucified for us. The work was polished in the resurrection, when the power of sin, death and hell were destroyed by the Living, victorious Christ. The work continues in the ascended Christ, who promises that He goes to prepare a place for us and that He will come again to take us to be with Him. We live in that promise now as we gather with our God and Saviour in His church, but we know it gets better when God dwells with us in the fulness of His glory, where He is our God and we are His people. That’s really what matters. We will be with God, who makes His dwelling among us, and in whom we live forever.

If we are looking for a description of the new heaven and new earth, we won’t find exactly what we want. No maps, no blueprints, no promotional pictures exist, other than the words John shares as he is given a glimpse of this. John only told us what mattered—and probably it is all that mattered to him—that God makes it all new; that God destroys sin’s corruption; that God is with us, and in Him we have life forevermore.

We are living in a day and age when we see the corruption of this world getting worse and worse. Our attitudes towards sexuality; our indifference to the things of God; our selfish, self-serving natures only show how much this world has deteriorated. When anyone who espouses Christian views is seen as a threat to society, we are seeing just how corrupt things have become. Thankfully, we see what God has in store for us: *God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.* God will bring His victory in spite of the evil of the world.

The book of Revelation ends with a promise and a simple prayer: *“He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!* (Revelation 22:20, ESV) That day is drawing near. A whole new world is on the way. Hold on to Christ in faith. Trust His promise. He makes all things new. In that hope, we pray, *Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!* We wait with joyous hope for Your appearing. Amen.