

New Heaven, New Earth
Revelation 21:1-6
The Source, October 28, 2015

I chose this passage for several reasons: One, it is the lectionary passage for this Sunday. And two, we have had a lot of memorials lately, and memorials get us thinking about death. We don't fully understand what happens after we die, but there are clues in the Bible.

Jesus did say he was preparing a place for us, and will come back and take us there. There is the promise that one day we will mount up on wings like eagles, and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. It says nothing will ever be able to separate us from the love of God...not even death. All of this gives hope to the dying and the families, and are verses I quote at memorials...

...including this passage in Revelation, especially the part about "no more death or mourning or crying or pain." Sounds wonderful, doesn't it? There is this promise, this hope of something to come, something new. Let's look at it a little more closely.

The passage starts out speaking of a new heaven and a new earth. Here is a theological question for you to think about...for fun: Is the new heaven and earth a completely new heaven and earth? Or, is this a redeemed heaven and earth made new? Sort of like a resurrection - same but different. Remember after Jesus rose from the dead people didn't recognize him. It was Jesus, but something was different, new, glorified.

This was the viewpoint of C.S. Lewis. He says in *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Last Battle*:

"It is hard to explain how this sunlit land was different from the old Narnia, the new one was a deeper country; every rock and flower and blade of grass looked as if it meant more. I can't describe it any better than that; if you ever get there, you will know what I mean.

Whatever your view (whether it will be a completely new heaven and earth, or a transformed/renewed heaven and earth), it will be wonderful.

In this scene in Revelation, a new Jerusalem comes down out of heaven to earth (verse 2). The focus is now on earth. We are not being "raptured" out of the earth; rather, the city is being raptured to earth to live with us. What does this remind you of?

Throughout scripture, God is always coming to us:

- God was with Adam and Eve in the garden.
- God tabernacles (pitches tent) with the Israelites in the wilderness
- Ezekiel 37:27 “My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God”
- Jesus (Emmanuel – God with us)
- Holy Spirit (indwells us)

The theme of “God with us” (Emmanuel) continues in the future on the new earth.

Now, think about the songs we are singing today about how the earth is not our home, we are just passing through, crossing from here to there...awaiting life in our eternal home with God.

Revelation, however, reverses these here-ever-after hymns with it’s own hymn: See, the home of God is among mortals. (verse 3) God already lives among us now through the Holy Spirit. What Revelation says is that God will live *even more* with God’s people on this earth someday.

In Revelation, we do not go to make our home with God. Instead, God comes to make God’s home among us. And did you notice what kind of home it will be? A magnificent city...“a bride beautifully dressed for her husband”!

Why a city? Aren’t cities full of busyness, noise, chaos, and crime? Isn’t it in cities where humans are at their worst? Isn’t the obvious choice a garden? It all started in a garden. Shouldn’t it end in a redeemed, new garden? Instead it is a redeemed city where God’s love and power will have full sway, where all wrongs will be righted and where there will be neither sorrow nor suffering nor death anymore.

So what does this all mean for as we head towards the end of our lives? Just wait?

This is “yet to come”, but when God says, “See, I am making all things new,” the verb tense is neither past nor future, but ongoing...including the present. As we head towards the end of our earthly lives, as we anticipate what is to come, God is still making things new...in our lives, in our churches, in our cities, on our earth. What new thing is God doing?

How can we live as citizens of God's New Jerusalem now?

Maybe our task is to be making something new, to help redeem our churches, our cities.

There was an African-American woman who lived deep in the Louisiana bayous and who had raised a dozen or more children, most of them as adoptees or foster children. When a newspaper reporter asked the woman why she had done this, she responded, "I saw a new world a' comin'."

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said this in one of his last sermons expressing that the New Jerusalem was both a future and a present reality: "Thank God for John, who centuries ago, out on a lonely, obscure island called Patmos caught a vision of a New Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God, who heard a voice saying, 'Behold I make all things new — former things are passed away.' God grant that we will be participants in this newness. ... If we will but do it, we will bring about a new day of justice and brotherhood and peace. And that day the morning stars will sing together."