

The Fifth Sunday of Easter C
Revelation 21:1-6 and John 13:31-35
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth 19/05/2019
Greg Bensted

To you God's dearly beloved, who are called to be saints: Grace, peace, and love from Father God, Lord Jesus Christ, and Holy Spirit.

"I saw a new heaven and a new earth," St John says. "I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." I heard "the one who was seated on the throne [say], 'See, I am making all things new.'" Let's pray:

The last two weeks have been pretty rough. I have seen, heard, and experienced things very different to John's apocalyptic wonder. There's been severe flooding in Mozambique, an earthquake off Papua New Guinea and a Marsquake on the Red Planet, a collapsed building in Shanghai, rocket attacks by Hamas and retaliatory airstrikes by Israel. These things are happening not only at the global and interplanetary level. They're local too. I have been immersed in death and mourning and I know that for some of you, the ground under your feet is shaking and unstable, the structures of your life are collapsing, your world has exploded.

With no end in sight to death, destruction, and suffering, all that I have seen and heard drives me back to the Revelation to St John. But I don't want to read his words again. I want to see what he saw. I want to hear what he heard. And I don't think I'm alone in that. The people of Mozambique want to see and hear. The people of Shanghai want to see and hear. The people of Gaza want to see and hear. The people of Israel want to see and hear. You want to see and hear. The darkness of the circumstances, however, make it difficult to see and hear that all things are being made new.

How appropriate it is then that today's gospel takes us back to another dark night; a last supper, a betrayal, a departure, an impending death. It's the night before Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus has fed his disciples. He's washed their feet. Judas has stepped out into the dark night of betrayal. Jesus tells his disciples that he is leaving and that they can't go with him. Peter and Thomas will ask what everyone is thinking. "Why not?" "Where are you going?" "How will we find our way?" They no doubt feel that the structures of their lives are crumbling and the ground shaking. Their world is changing.

The disciples will have to learn, see, and trust that even in the midst of terror, tragedy, pain, death and sorrow, all things are being made new. So must we. We too must learn that God's "making new" happens right in the midst of the calamity and the circumstances of our everyday lives. The disciples' have work to do and so do we. It's not easy work. In fact, it's the most difficult work we'll ever do. It's the work of love.

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

This commandment is Jesus' departing instruction. It's not so much something to be attained or completed; rather, a way of living and being, a direction and attitude. It will ensure Jesus' presence among the disciples and continue his work of making all things new. ***"Love one another."*** Think about it. The space Jesus once physically occupied amongst his disciples is now to be filled with their love for one another. The space Jesus once physically occupied is now to be filled with... our love for one another.

Our love for one another is iconic and revelatory. Our love for one another makes Christ present in whatever circumstances we might find ourselves. Jesus' command to love one another is preparation for our participation in his resurrected life, here and now.

The point that I'm building up to, and the connection between the Revelation to John and the Gospel of John is this: Love reveals the new heaven and new earth. Love is the gateway, the entry, into the new Jerusalem. Love makes all things new. Love is both the means and the goal, a journey that has no ending and a destination that has no fixed point. Love makes the new heaven and the new earth something that is happening now as Jesus' resurrection transforms and creates new life.

The love Jesus commands is independent of what or how we think of someone else. It's not determined by our assessment of his or her qualities or lovability. It takes us beyond sentimentality, emotions, and familial kinship. It is more about a choice than a feeling. If we are disciples, followers of Jesus, we show it by choosing to love one another. The mark of a disciple of Jesus is not what they believe but how they show love.

Love is the commitment, attachment, and loyalty to one another that is embodied and practiced in concrete ways. We don't believe or reason our way into loving one another. We act our way into loving one another. That's what Jesus did. His descent from heaven, his life, death, and resurrection are nothing less than the embodiment and enactment of God's love for sinful humanity. You and I, his disciples, continue that through our love for one another.

Folks, it's all pretty simple when you strip the furniture back to bare wood. It's about people, life, and circumstances. It's about seeing that, ***"the home of God is among mortals."*** What do you think that looks like?

It looks like people running towards the explosion to help the injured. It's about eyes looking for movement in the rubble, ears listening for a whimper, and bare hands digging for life. It's a bedside vigil when all you can do is hold a hand and wipe away tears. It's cooking and delivering a meal to one whose appetite has been stolen by sorrow. It's making a cup of tea for someone who really needs a breather. It's Eric and Lyn answering their phone in the middle of the night when I ring for advice about a very sick child. It's the courage to sit with someone's pain and loss knowing you have no idea what to say or do. It's the giving of one's money to care for another whom you've never and will never meet. It's a silent night of tears and prayer. It's 40 years of dedication to married life as Ian and Maralyn Nitschke are celebrating today. Congratulations!

These and a thousand other acts like them are the acts of love that have been done for us and, by God's grace, we do for one another. When I see these things happening - and I do every day, I see a new heaven and a new earth and I know myself to be living in the new Jerusalem. When I hear stories about these acts of love, I experience all things being made new.

St John's vision is a reality as close as the person next to you and as broad as events on the other side of the planet. Jesus says, ***"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another"***, and as you do, I want you to know that you're participating with me in, ***"making all things new."*** Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.