

May 26, 2019 Sixth Sunday of Easter
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Peace Lutheran Church – Austin, Texas

GOSPEL

John 14:23-29

The holy gospel according to Saint John, the fourteenth chapter.

Glory to you, O Lord.

²³Jesus answered [Judas (not Iscariot),] “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

²⁵“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. ²⁸You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. ²⁹And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

As humans, when we need to make sense of our lives and the world, we tend to go back to the beginnings of things...We tell the stories of where we come from and what we are made of. What stories were you told about where you come from? What stories do you tell now?

As the people of God, we go back to a garden...to a God whose Word is life...and to the original goodness of all creation, including ourselves. When we are wandering somewhere between where we've come from and where we are going, we need to remember that garden and that goodness.

But, maybe you've noticed that our collective imagination is drawn to endings, too...when everything that has been hidden will be uncovered...the truth laid bare. When we will arrive, and our destination will hold the answers to our deepest aching uncertainties...and we won't have to be afraid any more...even though we may struggle on the journey there.

The apocalypse is captivating, isn't it? Humankind has been telling the stories of apocalypse for as long as we've been telling stories. These days, we just use many more millions of dollars and much more complex technology to do it. But we are practicing an old, old trade when we go see Bruce Willis fly to space to blow up an asteroid. And so, walking out of those blockbuster summer movies, our first question might be, "Why did they think it was more efficient to train drillers to become astronauts than astronauts to become drillers?" But the deeper question is, "Why do we love stories like these?"

It's not because we love to think about the end of the world. At least I don't think so. Not really. In fact, the reason is in the name. Because "apocalypse" doesn't mean "ending," or "disaster;" it means "unveiling," it means "revealing what has been covered or hidden." The apocalypse is where the veil is lifted and truth is revealed.

It is because of this that we need Revelation...not because we need a playbook for the end times...because Revelation is not...I will say this again...Revelation IS NOT a series of predictions. It is a prophecy, though...and those are not the same thing. It is a prophecy in that it uncovers...it reveals...truths about who we really are...that we need to both confront and trust...because the truths that are uncovered are both difficult and comforting.

In the mainline Protestant churches, we've mostly left Revelation alone...like an embarrassing or frustrating member of the family you try to avoid sitting close to at Thanksgiving. Unfortunately, this has given the likes of Jerry Jenkins and Tim LaHaye a monopoly in explaining what it means. Which is a shame...because it's so so much better...and so much more important than a series of poorly written novels...If I could meet those two in person to talk to

them about this book, I think I would be tempted to quote a wiser leader than myself, Indigo Montoya, and say, “I don’t think it means what you think it means.”

So, I propose we ought to visit the landscape of John’s strange vision...especially today, when we have heard from its final chapters...from the ending of the ending of all things. (Aside: if you want to learn to love this book of the Bible, I highly recommend the book *The Rapture Exposed* by Barbara Rossing. It’s delightful.)

When we read Revelation, we are reading John’s vision for the truth and the hope that was under the surface of the life God’s people were living in his time...in the midst of the extractive empire of Rome, which was quite literally designed to siphon resources from a sprawling network of conquered lands and into the heart of the empire’s power. Roads and shipping channels were sites of an unholy exchange to enrich and privilege some lives at the expense of others. Throughout this vision, John is speaking of how God’s truth opposes this extraction...how it will break in upon this machinery and dismantle it...and pull out of it the precious children who have been ground up in its gears...and place them in a transformed reality...where the whole city has become like the Holy of Holies in the temple...nothing between God’s people and God’s presence anymore. In this city, the Good Shepherd has taken the form of a little lamb, who sits on the throne at the center of the city. And at the heart of that city are these rich natural resources...not to be measured out and sold but that are free for all people and all nations...a river of water of life...and a tree with healing leaves for all the nations.

On this weekend when we remember those whose lives have been consumed by the monstrosity of human warfare...we can look to this final vision where all the nations come together and there is healing for all people.

When the truth is fully revealed, we return to the tree of life that was in that first garden...We go back to the beginning...or maybe even before the beginning...because this time no fruit is forbidden. The life and breath that came before conflict, exploitation, and suffering...the first, good things return

to gather up God's children again. And while everything in the world of the empire and the world we know comes at a price...the healing and wholeness God offers...has no price tag...

There is only grace and love that grow and flow freely.

And the thing about an apocalypse is...it only ever shows us what is already true...but hidden or denied. So much of the world is devoted to scarcity and exclusivity: It is only worth having it if someone else can't...We have membership and benefits and perks...Everything is a commodity...even us...because you better believe that when it comes to Facebook, and so much of the world...we are the product being sold. Everything is a transaction...an exchange...

And none of that is real. Because the truth under all that fear and all those power plays...is: we are each and every one of us, precious, created by a God who fashioned the cosmos...looked at it and sighed, smiling...saying, "That's good." And nothing can take that away. No one can bottle it or sell it. And God is so devoted to waking us up to this beautiful truth...that the Shepherd became a lamb...became a part of this hurting, broken world...to chip away that layer of lies and show us that under our fear and pain...we are children of God...and if we are children of God, then we are enough...and there is enough...and more than enough...no matter what anyone tries to tell you.

That is where the story begins. And that is where it ends. And it isn't always easy to be on the path in between...but nothing between here and there can change who we are and what we're made of...not yesterday, or today, or tomorrow.

Thanks be to God. Amen.