

“Remembering Tomorrow” 2015
Revelation 21:1-7

When I was a little boy,
my father’s aunt would usually come for Thanksgiving
and then stay with us through Christmas and the new year.

During those visits
we loved it when she would tell us stories about our ancestors.
She would urge us to feel a sense of pride **and connection**
by letting their accomplishments influence our lives.

And almost every time I left to go somewhere, she would admonish me,
“Now you remember who you are when you’re out there today.”

I am pretty sure she wasn’t worried about me forgetting my name,
but her concern was that peer pressure or the lies of this world
might cause me to compromise my heritage or integrity,
and settle for less than the truth and best I could be.

We all know that this world
can be a very difficult, a confusing and crushing place.

We can lose ourselves, our confidence and sense of truth and hope.
We can feel overwhelmed, even lost or abandoned when problems, when disappointments and
troubles keep coming our way...
...to where we can’t imagine a tomorrow any different than today.

That is the climate into which the book of Revelation was written
addressed to Christians of seven church communities of faith
who were struggling, fearful and suffering
under severe and extreme persecution.

Revelation was written during the reign of Emperor Domitian,
who believed that Christianity was causing a disunity
that was sapping the strength from the Roman Empire.
So for the good of the empire and his rule he attempted
to destroy that perceived threat by wiping out any Christians who refused to recant and
turn aside from their faith.

In the face of such painful suffering and violent persecution,
it felt to many that perhaps God had abandoned them,
as they felt their hope, joy and faith being crushed.

John wrote the book of Revelation to address their fear,
trying to encourage them to remain steadfast in their faith
by reassuring them of God’s power, promises and victory,
and certainty that God was at work with a purpose,

In the chapters prior to our reading in Revelation chapter 21,
drawing upon images from stories & writings of the Old Testament

**the author reminds them of God's faithfulness in the past
by recasting OT images into their current context.**

Remember,

how God heard the cries of the slaves in bondage in Egypt,
as with a mighty and miraculous hand how the Lord
brought them through the wilderness wasteland,
and fulfilled each promise made long before
by establishing them in the Promised Land.

Remember,

how from the defeat & hopelessness of exile in distant Babylon,
as promised, though it seemed unlikely and impossible,
yet the Jewish people did return to rebuild
Jerusalem, the Temple and the nation Israel.

And so now, even under the terrible persecution and threat of Rome,
when once again it seems impossible and hopeless,
what does the history of our ancestors
and God's word and promises suggest to you? ...
... and is it not, **that a hopeful future awaits?**

Revelation is poetry, not a detailed blueprint of future events.

It is a call to remember who you are out there in the world,
and promise that even amid all the trouble & difficulties,
the confusion and hostility you're having to endure...

... you are still **a chosen**, precious and beloved child of God,
and you are connected as a part of a huge family of God,
a part of the Church of Jesus Christ
that has endured down through the ages ...

... and by God's steadfast love and grace you can be assured
that the Lord your God will not be set back or defeated,
but has already won
the ultimate victory over evil, sin and death.

Listen to the promises that await,
not simply to fix or repair a damaged world tainted by sin,
not just a bit nicer, but something is being created all new.

vs. 1

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.

In Scripture, the book of Revelation in particular,

"the sea" represents the watery chaos from which evil emerges,
meaning that in God's new creation,
ultimately even the source of evil will be no more.

vs. 2

And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

This new city descends from heaven, it's from God, it is a gift;
and not something that by our own works we accomplish...

... and in Revelation

God's promises that flow all through the words of Scripture,
will now at last be entirely fulfilled: vs. 3~5

... the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." ... "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."

Isn't that an incredible picture of God?

Not off in the clouds somewhere, but living right next door,
wiping away our tears, one by one, recasting our pain
and our brokenness in the light of God's blessings,

you belong to me, and I will never let you go.

saying:

These words are not to say that our hope of heaven is intended
to deny or to discount the importance and value of this life;
**but that it gives us strength and courage, faith and hope
to live this life well, faithfully and expectantly
with an eye toward a gracious and certain future.**

The point is, that the values, lies and compromises of this world
are as obsolete in God's new creation,
**as the slide rule I learned to use in the class required
for all freshman science & engineering majors in college.**

Which is to say that

what God's grace accomplished in the life and ministry of Jesus
gives us gracious hope, courage and confidence beyond the
pain, brokenness and distress of this world that we see;

for we know

that God is up to far more that we can yet perceive... vs. 6-7
me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

Then he said to

This Revelation passage, words of Jesus, describe God's promise
which reassures us of God purpose, and this hope of heaven
**enables us to live in this world with courage & confidence
knowing that our life and relationship with God
will not end up as a corpse rotting away in a grave.**

When we know that our destiny is glorious, gracious and certain, →

**then we are free to live out the radical demands of God's love,
and we are free to sacrifice in total faithful obedience
and to risk giving ourselves fully into God's service,
for we know in trusting hope our true destination...**

... so then our focus

**isn't locked on our success or even survival in this world,
but can be lived mindful of preparation for glory,
as we strive to grow deeper and ever closer to God;**

- as Paul describes this, 2 Corinthians 4:17

For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure.

... or as he expands his explanation in Romans 8:18 & 21

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ... that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

So as we come to the Lord's Table today, **we are here to remember**

as we reenact Christ's loving faithfulness toward us,
and we reaffirm our faith and trust in the promises of God.

Here at the Sacrament of the Lord's Table, →

we remember who we really are, a beloved people of faith,
and part of the Communion of all God's children
gathered from every place, and every time and age.

Let us therefore,

celebrate with gratitude the saints who preceded us,
for their lives, faithfulness, endurance and influence;
**and perhaps consider our own place in that history,
i.e. the influence that our living will have
on those who observe our lives and come after us.**

What a wise and blessed God we follow and serve

whose grace gathers us all to remember
as a foretaste of our eternal home that awaits,

“the home of God among mortals... where He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”

I can hardly wait,

so let us feast upon that gracious Good News, truth and hope!