

Revelation 21 & 22
A Vision Worthy of Your Life
Rev. Jonathan P. Cornell
11-25-18

Well I want to wish you all a very happy New Year's Eve. I see a few quizzical looks out there. No, I didn't go to bed last night hoping that I would wake up and it would magically be December 31st. I haven't been doing any time traveling either. But I want to wish you happy liturgical New Year's Eve. Still some confused looks.

The last Sunday in the Church's yearly calendar is today, which makes next Sunday, the first Sunday of Advent, the Church's New Year—making this of course New Year's Eve. And I know what you're thinking... "most boring New Year's Eve party ever." Well, I'm going to spend the next 20 minutes or so inviting the Holy Spirit to help convince you otherwise.

You might have noticed that the music of this morning's service has had a rather triumphal tone Crown Him with Many Crowns, Rejoice the Lord is King, Wonderful Merciful Savior, In Christ Alone. We have sung of the reign and majesty of the Risen Jesus, who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We call this Sunday Christ the King Sunday.

And for a few hundred years, particularly in the Anglican sector of our Christian family this Sunday wall called Stir-up Sunday. Not stirrup, like on a saddle, but stir up as in what happens when the Holy Spirit gets a hold of your heart and begins to stir your passion for God. They called it this because the Collect assigned for the morning began like this: Stir up, O Lord, the wills of your people.

Interestingly though, because Stir-up Sunday was also one week before Advent, people began to see it as an invitation to begin thinking about and perfecting their recipes for Christmas Pudding. So stir-up Sunday sort of morphed into an invitation to self-indulgent living.

But on this Sunday we invite the Spirit of God to stir up our hearts, that we might respond in faith to the one who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Let's pray.

Stir up, O Lord, the wills of your people; that they, richly bearing the fruit of good works, may by you be richly rewarded; through Jesus Christ who is alive with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit one God now and forever. Amen

It was surprising to find that Christ the King Sunday is a rather new celebration in the life of the church worldwide. Pope Pius XI instituted it in 1925 and he originally scheduled it for the last Sunday in October, but then in 1969 Vatican II moved it to this Sunday, the last before Advent. It was moved for Theological reasons, and now the whole Church celebrates it at that time.

Pius' encyclical was not a terribly exciting document, and it was overlooked by many. But we in the Reformed family of Christians would do well to read it because of our own history and some of our confessions of faith.

You see, for Pius in Italy, and for a group of protestant Pastors and Theologians called the Confessing Church movement in Germany, the 1920s and 30s was a time in world history that saw the rise of Fascism and totalitarian rule in Europe. In the wake of World War I, a war that left much of Europe decimated by confusion and chaos, Pius watched the rise of Benito Mussolini in Italy, and the Confessing Church watched the rise of Adolf Hitler in Germany.

It is no coincidence that Pius issued his encyclical in the very same year that Mussolini insisted in the title Il Duce (The Leader). Pius says this: "manifold evils in the world were due to the fact that the majority of men had thrust Jesus Christ and his holy law out of their lives; that as long as individuals and states refused to submit to the rule of our Savior, there would be no really hopeful prospect of a lasting peace among nations."

And from the writers of Barmen quoting the Gospel of John: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me." (John 14.6). "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. . . I am the door; if anyone enters by me, he will be saved." (John 10:1, 9.)

Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation. We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords--areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him.

These two bodies of leadership, both in Rome and in Germany, could see the gathering storms of Fascism and the threat that they posed to the Lordship of Christ among the people of their nations. For them, there could not be two kings. We must choose who we will follow, our allegiance must be total, there could be no divided loyalties.

These choices that Protestant and Catholic leaders put before their people, were the same choices that Moses and Joshua set before the people of Israel as they journeyed from one way of life to another. Throughout our history God's people have always been challenged with whom we will choose to serve. Moses told them that the choice of a God to follow was not a trifling matter. And Joshua told them to put away the gods of their ancestors so that they could, with a single focus, serve the Lord.

The challenges of Moses and Joshua, Pius, and the Confessing Church in Germany were spoken into times in which worlds were ending. The Hebrews were on the verge of entering the Promised Land, and even though that was an exciting moment for them, we shouldn't forget that things were also being taken away from them. The comfort and guidance of the pillar of clouds, the manna that they ate each morning as their daily bread, those familiar securities were being replaced by promises and possibilities, but they would have to trust God to lead them forward.

And in the middle of the 20th Century Totalitarian powers and murderous leaders plunged the world into death and destruction. Today brings its own challenges too doesn't it? Wars and rumors of

wars, the fear of one way of life collapsing into something foreign to us, strife in the political world, and strife in the church. And when it feels like our world is coming to an end, we cry out: “who’s in charge here?” And we lament, where is our hope?

It’s in times like this, times like which we have seen and lived all too often throughout our lives, that the book of Revelation is our great source of hope. You see Revelation was written to a group of people whose world was falling apart. It was written to a people who had chosen Christ the King instead of Cesar the Emperor, or Il Duce, or any other human leader demanding of our absolute allegiance. It is written to us as well, when our lives feel like they are falling apart, when we long for words of assurance and comfort. And that’s when we hear these last verses from Revelation.

We hear a loud voice from the throne, from the King, from the one who is in charge. And that voice tells us that what we are experiencing will not last forever, that a new life is on the way, that a new life is described as the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven. That all that is painful, despairing, and hopeless will come to an end Jesus Christ will restore his Kingdom on earth. This is often a vision we look to of the end times, and we are right to see it that way. But this is also a vision for us, here and now, as we go through life.

I believe that this new Jerusalem happens every single time our world, our way of living, our way of decision making, our way of overlooking the needs of another in favor of our own needs, comes to an end and God’s way and God’s love transforms our lives. In this sense the world comes to an end over and over again in us.

That’s why the words that tell of the true and final end of the world in Revelation help us when our worlds are falling apart.

So, these words come from God, they tell us what is true of God and what is true of us

God’s home is with us. We don’t have to search for God to be with him, but the entire story of the bible is God searching for us, finding us. We don’t have to ascend a steep mountain to go to the new Jerusalem, that new Jerusalem comes to us. The peace that comes to us is not a result of us working hard to recreate an Eden like experience. But peace comes to us in the image of a city.

Now many of you are natives of this wonderful community, and perhaps the idea that peace will come in the presence of a city like Chicago or New York, doesn’t sound very peaceful. And, many places in Scripture the city is the image of people trying to live their lives without God, Babylon, Sodom and Gomorrah. In the cities is where people try and Lord it over one another in power and persecution. But the new Jerusalem is where Christ is the ruler, a new order replaces the old order, the old way living.

And the voice from the throne tells us that the home of God is with us. We belong to him and no other.

The next word from the King is this that our tears will be wiped away. Our sorrow will not only come to an end, but the things that make us sorrowful will themselves come to an end. God’s not just going to comfort us and help us in the things that bring us discomfort, but God is going to redeem the whole sorry story of human history. This is our deep hope.

The chain reaction of human sin will come to an end. The terrible effects of my sin will no longer ripple and echo through the universe. For you see that God will not only wipe away the tears that we shed, but God will wipe away the tears that we cause.

And all these good words from these two texts are to remind us of God's purpose for us, and that purpose is to dwell in relationship and in union with him forever, to be his face, and to be made new. These bodies and lives we live are not going to be discarded when the new Jerusalem comes, but as the Apostle Paul says in Philippians 1, which we've spent the last 3 weeks studying together: he who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it in the day of Christ Jesus.

But if you were listening when we were reading the Scriptures. Not all the words of this passage are happy words, there are some things that will not be present in the Kingdom of God. Look again at verse 8: **But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."**

These are harsh words, and many would be tempted to leave them off of a reading like this. But if we are people who are committed to the whole of Scripture, then we can't choose only the passages that sound good to us. Seems strange that these words are present in the midst of this glorious picture of the new order that God is bringing to fruition, but this isn't the only place in Scripture where God's peaceable kingdom is followed by a horrifying description of what is just outside of the Kingdom.

At the end of Isaiah we hear about the new heaven and the new earth, there in the last words of Isaiah is described the fire outside the city in which all those who have rebelled against God will be burned.

What are we to make of these words? It's tempting to make them words of judgment against one another, assessing who will and will not be allowed in the Kingdom of God. But that is a dangerous road to tread. When we look at these words what we see in all of these sins, they are each and every one of them, a betrayal in one way or another, of a relationship. And each an every one of them is rooted in our betrayal of our relationship with God. But God in his love for us has reconciled the world to himself (2 Cor 5), by Jesus' outstretched arms of love on the cross. So we can be assured that the new Jerusalem will be marked by an unbroken fellowship with God, in which we acknowledge that not only is he the Lord of the universe, but also the Lord of our lives.

The book of Revelation draws the curtain back and reveals what life is like when it is centered on God, when we acknowledge with our entire being that Jesus Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And remember, Revelation is the book that starts out with the image of Jesus standing at the door of our hearts and the door of the church, asking each of us to hear his voice and to let him in. It is his voice that speaks words of truth and comfort and hope every time your world is coming to an end.

Jesus stands at the door of your heart with question, will you let me in? Will you let me sit on the throne of your life. Will you? Or will you

This new Jerusalem is not what the end looks like, but what the world looks like happen every
of given to a group of Christians

"His empire includes not only Catholic nations, not only baptized persons...but also all those who are outside the Christian faith; so that truly the whole of mankind is subject to the power of Jesus Christ." [28] Nor is there any difference in this matter between the individual and the family or the State; for all men, whether collectively or individually, are under the dominion of Christ. In him is the salvation of the individual, in him is the salvation of society. "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved." [29] He is the author of happiness and true prosperity for every man and for every nation. "For a nation is happy when its citizens are happy. What else is a nation but a number of men living in concord?" [30] If, therefore, the rulers of nations wish to preserve their authority, to promote and increase the prosperity of their countries, they will not neglect the public duty of reverence and obedience to the rule of Christ. What We said at the beginning of Our Pontificate concerning the decline of public authority, and the lack of respect for the same, is equally true at the present day. "With God and Jesus Christ," we said, "excluded from political life, with authority derived not from God but from man, the very basis of that authority has been taken away, because the chief reason of the distinction between ruler and subject has been eliminated. The result is that human society is tottering to its fall, because it has no longer a secure and solid foundation."