

***“There’s A New World Coming!”***  
**Revelation 21:1-6**

The German Protestant reformer, Martin Luther, was once asked what he would do if he knew that the world was coming to an end tomorrow. His answer: “I would plant an apple tree.”

Luther knew what many others don’t get: The world is NOT going to end. It’s going to be renewed and transformed. That is affirmed in the very text of the Bible.

For years, the tabloids and others have been warning us that we are living in the end times, that it is only a matter of days before the world will be destroyed in some dramatic inferno.

I’ve shared with you all before about some of my weird experiences walking through the terminal at LAX (Los Angeles International Airport). I remember once back when I was in the service and I had just returned stateside from overseas. I had no sooner walked off the airplane and, I was accosted by a woman who was wearing some odd-looking garment, lots of beads, and sandals on her feet. She wanted to sell me a book. She explained to me that the world was soon to come to an end.....and then she launched into a monologue about a bunch of abstract stuff that I didn’t really understand – something about “cosmic consciousness” or some such thing. “The world is going to end,” she told me, “and it will be very, very, soon.” Then she offered me the “gift” of her book for a \$20 donation.

I said to her that I have just two questions to ask: “If the world is really going to end soon as you say it is, why would I want to waste my time reading a book about it? And second, why do you even need my \$20? (Conversation ended!)

Our scripture for today from the Book of Revelation tells us ahead of time what the world is headed for. Forget about all of the imagery that is in Revelation and focus this week on just this one passage:

*“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.”*

This is NOT about God (or anyone else) “destroying” heaven and earth and starting all over again. What it is, rather, is about God taking our present earth and restoring it to its original condition. Its original condition was paradise. It was the Garden of Eden.

One of the biggest misconceptions about the Christian faith is that it’s all about going to heaven after we die. The idea being that once we die, our souls leave our bodies and go floating up to the Pearly Gates where we spend eternity sitting on clouds and playing harps. It’s no wonder that the concept of heaven sounds so boring to most people!

But you see, that isn’t what heaven really is. Listen to this next verse:

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

Heaven comes down HERE. It’s not about us going floating up to heaven. It’s about heaven coming down here where it joins together with the earth in God’s glorious new creation!

Let me ask all of you something: When God created Adam and Eve, where did He put them? In a garden. Right? God made them as *physical* beings and God placed them in a *physical* environment.

God created Adam and Eve as flesh and blood, and God put them in a garden – not on a cloud. And it was the garden of paradise. It was the garden where people do not grow old, or get sick, or die. Nor do they harm one another. It was a garden of God’s original intent for creation.

It sounds a little bit like heaven, doesn’t it? Well, that’s what the real heaven will be! The Bible tells us that one day Christ will return and He will raise the dead. The prophet Daniel wrote that *Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt* (Daniel 12:2)

I can’t tell you precisely what that all will be like except to say this: our physical bodies will be resurrected. And, scripture tells us that the experience will be more joyous for some than it is for others. There *will* be a final judgment that goes along with that.

The bottom line is that from that day forward, there will be absolutely no question in anybody’s mind about who’s really in charge.

Next verse:

*“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; 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.’ And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’”*

THAT is the future that the earth is headed towards. God comes HERE and lives among us, and in our resurrected bodies we will never again experience illness or aging or death.

We won't be floating on clouds playing harps – instead we will be walking on grass that is green and being refreshed by water that is pure. It will be the ultimate joining of heaven and earth as they were meant to be in the first place.

So many people find themselves terrified of what the future ultimately may hold in store. We need to remember that God OWNS the future!

Some of you here at St. Peter's are former Lutherans, as am I. If you've ever listened to Garrison Keillor on *A Prairie Home Companion* (Keillor is himself a Lutheran) as he describes Minnesota Lutherans in particular, you'll recognize that what he says about Lutherans in general is basically true and without exaggeration. Once on his radio program, Garrison Keillor said that Lutherans from Minnesota will not enjoy heaven. Here is what he said:

*"My people are not Paradise people. We've lived in Minnesota all of our lives and it has taken a lot out of us. My people aren't sure they'll even like paradise: not sure perfection is all its cracked up to be. My people will arrive in heaven and stand just inside the gate, shuffling around. It's a lot bigger than I thought it was going to be, they might say. We'll say, "No thank you, we can't stay for eternity, we'll just sit and have a few minutes of bliss and then we have to get back!"*

Like most people, Keillor makes the mistake of thinking that heaven is a city up in the sky – when scripture tells us very plainly that heaven will be coming down here and renewing the earth.

There is a new world coming! And in that post-resurrection world which will be populated by God's people, I can tell you that even Minnesota will be redeemed and renewed! And they will be surprised at how much like home it feels to them.

The times we're living in today, in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, are similar to the story of Noah. There had been endless days on the ark; days of waiting and hoping. In every direction Noah could see only water. One day, in faith, he released a dove to search for land. The Bible says the dove "found no place to set her foot" and returned. Noah was put on hold. He had to wait. He waited with faith and in hope. So do we.

He sent out a dove a second time. It returned with an olive branch in its beak. Noah could not see the land, but he knew it was there. It began to appear out of the watery waste. The worst was over. As sure as God made little green apples, a new, green world would emerge out of the wreckage of the old.

In Christ we find an olive branch pointing toward a day when all tragedy shall be overcome and all pain destroyed. A new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. With the Second Coming of Christ, a glorious new realm will emerge. Through Christ, we can be a part of it. AMEN.