

Revelation 21 (NRSV)

21 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. 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. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, 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;

⁴ 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.”

⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” ⁶ Then he said to 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. ⁷

Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will

be my children. ⁸ But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers,

the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

⁹ Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” ¹⁰ And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. ¹¹ It has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal. ¹² It has a great, high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites; ¹³ on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. ¹⁴ And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

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²² I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. ²⁵ Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶ People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. ²⁷ But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices

abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

These are among the closing words of John's Revelation and as such they are among the closing words of our beloved scripture. We have swept over the frightening violent imagery of most of John's apocalyptic imagery – the four horsemen of the apocalypse who unleash the first woes into our world. The whore of Babylon – who seduced God's people away from God - finally disgraced and defeated. The beast, the false prophet, and the dragon – that unholy trinity all conquered by the Lamb of God ... the Lion of Judah. The cosmic war between good and evil fought out in the most vivid terms --- a war in which ultimately Good prevails. And now this scene ... the battles are over, the war is one, the victors are triumphant, the losers vanquished. The end.

But as always in John's Revelation ... as always in our beloved scriptures the first and the last word is - God! In this passage it is God whom we encounter - God whom hovered over the chaos and created this world – God who led the children of Israel from bondage – God who forgave and forgives again and again – our God who is most clearly revealed in Christ Jesus the Lamb.

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For here we are presented with a new heaven and a new earth – God our creator has created all things new. There is no more sea – sea which often represents in biblical stories chaos, danger, threat. Something that must be held back for our protection. Something that threatens to deluge us in floods. In the end there is no sea ... no chaos ... no threat. Our sovereign God has recreated a place of complete order and balance. A place of safety and peace.

A place of love – prepared as lovingly as a bride prepares for her husband – so this place of peace has been prepared for us and prepared for the Lamb. For this is a place of love where we will see face to face Our beloved God – who will dwell among his people. .. his children.

For this is a holy place that reflects the glory of God. Reflecting it as clearly as a rare Jew or the clearest crystal. A place built on the sanctity of the People of God -- the believers. A holy place that reflects the perfection of its Creator in its balance, its symmetry, its radiance. And reminds us that we too were created in perfection.

This safe, loving, holy place does not need anything to sustain it but the Creator alone – the Creator who is its light, its source of water, its source of life. A place that's light beckons to all of best of God's Creation ... all the best of our humanity.

This, my friends, is the last word! This is what our faith is all about. The promise that we too may one day walk through the New Jerusalem ... and encounter God ... encounter Christ ... not mediated through the word ... but rather the Word enfleshed sitting on the throne welcoming us... embracing us.

That is the promise that rings true in every age ... in every circumstance ... to every Christian throughout history. God is with us ... even though we encounter our own trials and tribulations. For the message throughout Revelation is that God does not put us in some protective bubble that shields us from all woe – no but what God does do is give us the courage, the faith, the wisdom and the strength to survive any woe this world may throw our way.

Whether they are the external forces that bombard us – loss of job, loss of home, loss of security, loss of health, loss of a loved one. God is with us – to help us, to do battle for us, to bring us through. Even as we battle our own demons... as we live out that cosmic war between good and evil that rages in our own hearts and

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our own minds. The Lamb shall be triumphant – good shall prevail – we shall prevail. And whether it is this creation as a whole that comes to an end ... or simply our individual earthly journey within it ... we will be gathered to that New Jerusalem ... that perfect home created for us... and for which we were created. For God is the first and the last word of Revelation ... God is the first and the last word of our Bible ... for the first and the last word, in everything, is God.