

Davidson College Presbyterian Church
Davidson, North Carolina
Lib McGregor Simmons
“Alpha and Omega”
Revelation 22
15th Sunday after Pentecost
August 28, 2016

The concluding chapter of Revelation takes us back to the beginning of the Bible. It recalls the picture that today’s Old Testament lesson from Genesis has given us of creation as it was before the Fall. The stream which rises up from the earth in Genesis has become the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing through the middle of the new Jerusalem in Revelation. The tree of life which was in the Garden of Eden in Genesis is now in the midst of the city, and the leaves of the tree of life are to heal the nations.

The central features of the new Jerusalem are the throne of God and the Lamb who represents Jesus the Christ, joined together in God’s redemptive work. (1)

Eugene Peterson, commenting on this last chapter of Revelation, has written, “The front line work of Christian communities...is not against unbelief, but against dulled belief; not against misbehavior but against blurred behavior. No one has given better leadership to this work than St. John [of Patmos].” (2)

As we come to the close of this summer series on Revelation, it seems right to review what appears in the early chapters of Revelation. You will remember that Revelation is a letter to seven churches in Asia Minor: Ephesus, Pergamum, Smyrna, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

John’s most pointed criticism was of the church in Laodicea.

Laodicea was wealthy. Its one outstanding shortcoming was its water. Laodicea had no local water source of its own; its water was piped in, and by the time it arrived in Laodicea, its tepidness and its high mineral content made the water nauseating. John’s devastating message to the church in Laodicea says that even though they are wealthy, they are no better than their water: “I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”

After that disturbing critique, John launches an even more shocking reproach. Laodicea’s pride was that it was a medical center known for successfully treating eye disease. It was the home of what was known as “Phrygian powder” from which a medicinal eye powder was made. John’s message takes the very thing of which the Laodiceans were proudest and turns their pride on its head: “For you say, ‘I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.’ You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.” The city famous for its eye salve is “blind.”

The only positive line in John’s word to the Laodicean church is this, “I reprove and discipline those whom I love.” (3)

At the beginning of the book of Revelation, God’s word to the Laodicean Church through their pastor John is: I love you and I am going to do everything that I can to enable you to clear your eyes so that you can see and be a part of the hopeful panorama that is God’s peace and justice and salvation for all creation.

We come now to the end of Revelation.

There have been many gifts in our summer journey through Revelation. Chief among them for me and I hope for you as well is that this book enables us to clear our eyes so that we can see the transcendent import of the small acts which are the warp and woof of our daily living.

A number of you will remember Emily Wilkes who graduated from Davidson a couple of years ago. She joined DCPC while a student and served as co-moderator of our college ministry. She spent the first year after her graduation in ministry at the Church of the Pilgrims in Washington, DC, and for the past year she has been a Young Adult Volunteer at Ferncliff Camp and Conference Center in Arkansas. She was actually in worship a couple of Sundays ago, and this week will leave for Peru where she will serve a second Young Adult Volunteer year.

In a blog entry which Emily posted this past week, she reflected on some of the perspective shifts which have happened for her this past year...some of the ways, one might say, that God has opened her eyes to the import of her daily acts.

Here are some of them:

Not only does she say...I'm dumping smelly, sloppy leftover food covered with fruit flies into a pile of dirt. Then I shovel poop from goats, chickens, lambs, and rabbits onto that pile too.

But she also says...Through composting, I have the opportunity to intimately participate in the cycles of death and life, perhaps one of the most tangible examples of resurrection on earth.

Not only does she say..."I'm hitting a drum completely out of rhythm."

But she also says...I'm creating a "joyful noise" with people experiencing homelessness as a member of the community of Mercy Church. I'm worshiping God in a space where can play any instrument they choose, regardless of skill level; we're valued for whatever gifts we bring to the table...

Not only does she say..."I'm sitting in a Little Rock School District board meeting, where I've been sitting for the last four hours."

But she also says...I'm accompanying a transgender youth who grew up in this district as she attempts to share her story with the powers that be. I'm witnessing people in power actively attempt to silence her by...making her the last speaker on the agenda.

Not only does she say..."I'm pulling weeds out of a raised bed...I'm planting seeds, watering sprouts, harvesting crops."

But she also says...I'm living into my call to be a steward of the earth...I'm creating space for new life to emerge. (4)

This is how God has worked to change Emily's perspective so that she sees her daily acts as participating with Christ in God's redemptive work.

My hope and prayer is that through our reading of Revelation this summer, God has been at work opening your eyes to the transcendent nature of your daily acts.

No longer do you think merely, "I'm grocery shopping, planning meals, cooking breakfast, packing lunches, getting dinner on the table for the thousandth time." You also think, "I'm participating in the sacramental act of sharing food as Jesus shared communion with his disciples and I doing so I remember to share what I have so that no child on the planet goes to bed hungry."

No longer do you think merely, "I'm stuck in traffic yet again on my way home from work." You also think, "I have been given this gift of time and I dare not squander it by getting needlessly annoyed, but I am called to use it to pray for my neighbors near and far."

No longer do you think merely, "It's Sunday morning and I'm going to church." You also think, "I'm teaching my children, my stepchildren, my grandchildren, and reminding myself as well that life isn't all about me. It is about worshiping God and enjoying God forever."

No longer do you think merely, "I'm putting money in the offering plate." You also think, "I am grateful to God for gifts and blessings which know no bounds, and I trust that God will use my meager gifts and talents to witness to the hope that one day, one day it really will be on earth as it is in heaven."

Last April, one of the presenters at the Young Adult Volunteer Discernment Event told a story. It seems a fitting conclusion to our summer series on Revelation:

A person came across three masons doing the same job.

She asks the first, "What are you doing?"

He responds, "I'm putting one brick on top of another."

She asks the second, "What are you doing?"

"I'm building a wall."

She asks the third, "What are you doing?"

And the third responds, "I'm building a cathedral for the glory of God."

Brothers and sisters, let us go forth to build cathedrals, not of brick and mortar, but of love, justice, mercy, peace, and hope for the glory of God.

And, as John of Patmos said in his last words, "May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints," and by "the saints," I am convinced that he meant, YOU!

Amen.

1. Catherine Gunsalus Gonzalez and Justo L. Gonzalez, *Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 143-144.
2. Eugene H. Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1988), 190.
3. Gonzalez and Gonzalez, 36.
4. Emily Wilkes, "From Arkansas to Moyobamba," *A Step Along the Way: Emily's YAV Year in Little Rock, Arkansas*, www.emilykwilkes.wordpress.com, August 25, 2016.