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St. Andrew’s

Genesis 1:24-2:3

Revelation 21:1-6

Genesis 1:24-2:3

God’s orderly and purposeful creation harmoniously comes together on the 6th day as humanity is created to be God’s partners as stewards of all that God has created. After 5 days of creation, day 6 begins at Genesis 1:24. Listen for God’s word to us:

²⁴ God said, “Let the earth produce every kind of living thing: livestock, crawling things, and wildlife.” And that’s what happened. ²⁵ God made every kind of wildlife, every kind of livestock, and every kind of creature that crawls on the ground. God saw how good it was. ²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth.”

²⁷ God created humanity in God’s own image,
in the divine image God created them,
male and female God created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, “Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and master it. Take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, and everything crawling on the ground.”

²⁹ Then God said, “I now give to you all the plants on the earth that yield seeds and all the trees whose fruit produces its seeds within it. These will be your food. ³⁰ To all wildlife, to all the birds in the sky, and to everything crawling on the ground—to everything that breathes—I give all the green grasses for food.” And that’s what happened. ³¹ God saw everything he had made: it was supremely good.

There was evening and there was morning: the sixth day.

2 The heavens and the earth and all who live in them were completed. ² On the sixth day God completed all the work that he had done, and on the seventh day God rested from all the work that he had done. ³ God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all the work of creation.

Revelation 21:1-6

This is the seventh and final vision in the book of Revelation. This vision of the New Jerusalem is detailed and dramatic, and a fitting climax to John’s amazing revelation.

Listen for God’s word for us:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ I heard a loud voice from the throne say, “Look! God’s dwelling is here with humankind. He will dwell with them, and they will be his peoples. God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. There will be no mourning, crying, or pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” ⁵ Then the one seated on the throne said, “Look! I’m making all things new.” He also said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” ⁶ Then he said to me, “All is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will freely give water from the life-giving spring.

GOING WHERE GOD IS HEADED

Presbyterian preacher and professor, Rev. Dr. Thomas Long, shares an experience he had while serving on, what he calls:

... an absolutely wonderful committee at Princeton University. It was called the Princeton University Chapel Advisory Council. And what made it wonderful was we only met once a year, we had no responsibilities, and we had wonderful lunches. What we would do is, we would hear reports from the campus chaplains about campus religious life, we would ask whatever questions we wanted to ask, provide whatever wisdom we thought we could provide, and then we would have a lunch and we would come back the next year. One meeting we were in the question and answer phase and one member of the committee asked the chaplains an awkward question. He was an old Wall Street lawyer and he said, “Tell me how the students at the university are morally these days. I want to know how they live ethically.”

Well, the chaplains looked at each other as if to say, who in the world wants to try that one? Finally, knowing that somebody had to say something, the Methodist chaplain responded, “Well, it’s hard to describe the students morally, but I think you might be pleased that they do a lot of good in the community. Many of them tutor after school. They serve in soup kitchens and in overnight shelters. Some of them are building Habitat for Humanity houses. As she began to talk, Rabbi Ed Feld, the Jewish chaplain at the university, began to grin. The more she talked, the bigger he grinned. Finally, it got disconcerting and she looked at him and said, “Ed, am I saying something funny here?”

"No," he said, "I'm sorry. I was just thinking what you're saying is the university students are good people and you're right. And they do good things in the community. And you're right. I was just thinking that the one thing they lack is a vision of salvation."

We all looked at the Jewish University chaplain and he said, "You know it's true. If you do not have some vision of what God is doing to repair creation, you can't get up and go to a soup kitchen every day. The world will finally beat you down."

If we don't have some vision of what God is doing to repair creation,

- some direction to participate in God's intent for the created order,
- we can't get up and do service to our neighbor every day,
- because the world will finally beat us down.
- Just turn on the evening news.
 - Or like many who can't anymore.

When reading from the Book of Revelation, it is both the culmination of this vision-writing from John, and the culmination of the Bible.

- A vision of where God is headed
 - What God's intention has been for creation from the beginning.
- The biblical journey starting with Genesis, leads to this great hymn from John's revelation,
- to give us a sense of direction to where God desires to take us.

History has experienced many detours along the way

- Things have not always happen as God intended.
- But even though there have been many detours and obstacles along the way
 - God reveals the vision of where everything is headed:

**"Look! God's dwelling is here
with humankind.**

**He will dwell with them,
and they will be his peoples.
God himself will be with them
as their God.**

**⁴ He will wipe away
every tear from their eyes.**

**Death will be no more.
There will be no mourning,
crying, or pain anymore,
for the former things have passed away."**

⁵ Then the one seated on the throne said, "Look! I'm making all things new."

The vision of this new holy city is God’s home with humanity.

- An angel takes John up on a high mountain
- Has a vision, a dream of God coming down from heaven.
- God comes down to us
 - Bringing a new heaven and new earth
 - One dwelling for God and God’s people.

In this new city there are no churches or temples

- Don’t need them because God is everywhere.
- Don’t need to point toward God because God is fully present all the time.

There is no need for the sun or moon

- All the light is provided by God’s presence
 - No streetlights or searchlights
- All the light is from God’s glory.

There are no polluted streams,

- no mercury-saturated lakes or acid rain in the city of God.
- There’s just one pure crystal river, flowing from the throne of God.
 - A river of life flows through it.

There are no hospitals in the city of God.

- No mental health clinics.
- Nobody’s on chemotherapy.
- The healing of God flourishes and shimmers like the leaves on a tree.

There are no gated communities in God’s city.

- No exclusive country clubs.
- No prisons, no jails, no lockdowns, no airport security checks.
- No.... the gates of God’s city are always unlocked and opened wide all the time, and the citizens of all the nations walk the streets in security and joy.

This city is God’s final destination.

- Our eternal home with the Creator.

Some may think this is “pie in the sky” theology.

- An unrealistic vision.
- A nice comforting thought for the grieving at a memorial.

But I don’t think so.

Just as Tom Long shared earlier:

- If we don’t have a vision of where God is going
- If we don’t know the purpose of what God is doing
- Then we have nothing to motivate us toward the goal of God’s kingdom revealed to us in Christ.
- We cannot live responsible, faithful, and ethical Christian lives in the present unless we have a clear and compelling vision of God’s future.
- We cannot be the church without a vision of where God is leading.
- Or like my partner has attached to her clipboard: *If you aim at nothing, you’ll surely hit it.*

George Harrison – the spiritual Beatle puts it this way in a song called “Any Road”

*Oh I've been traveling on a boat and a plane
In a car on a bike with a bus and a train
Traveling there and traveling here
Everywhere in every gear*

*But oh Lord we pay the price with a
Spin of a wheel - with the roll of a dice
Ah yeah you pay your fare
And if you don't know where you're going
Any road will take you there*

*And I've been traveling through the
dirt and the grime
From the past to the future
through the space and the time
Traveling deep beneath the waves
In watery grottoes and mountainous caves*

*But oh Lord we've got to fight
With the thoughts in the head
with the dark and the light
No use to stop and stare
And if you don't know where you're going
Any road will take you there*

Genesis invited all people to go to where God is headed from the beginning.

- And John’s revelation is the other bookend to all that God intends

The only way for this church and the whole collective church to get to where God is going

- Is to lean on one another
- Hang in there together
- and keep a picture of the kingdom in our sites.

Otherwise the Christian life is too difficult and demanding.

- How can any one of us walk the way of the cross alone?
- How can we influence the flow of the current cultural tide if we don’t know God’s final destination?
- That’s what Revelation is all about.

This is not about disconnecting and escaping from this world.

- Notice that God comes to us in this vision.
- God’s city comes to earth and makes all things new.
- God comes here to restore creation and us with it.

We can check in on the daily news

- we see terrible events caused by human ignorance, selfishness and sin.

Sometimes the biggest wrongs are the result of people who thought they were doing right!

- It’s strange how we can do harm and evil to each other even when we are trying to do good.
 - Maybe especially when we are trying to do good.

The theologian Arthur McGill many years ago put it this way:

“It does not do any good to tell people that they need to behave themselves and stop treating other people selfishly and hatefully and start serving others. Whether people serve themselves or serve others, is not entirely in their power to choose; it is a function of the kingdom to which they think they belong.”

We will act like the world that we see in our own vision.

- What we choose to do is the result of the world in which we think we are living.

But here’s some good news:

- This reading from Revelation has taken us up a high mountain with John.
- We have viewed a city to which all of us belong,
 - a city where the light of God is all in all
 - and the gates are open night and day
 - and there is no hunger or homelessness or violence.
- “We are citizens of that hope,” says Tom Long, “and the way you hope changes the way you vote.”
- The city in which we live changes the way we live.

When we leave here this morning,

- we’re going to *go out there*
- out there - where people are going to think that we belong to the same city as they.
- They’re going to expect us to behave like others with the customs of those cities.
- Let’s surprise them!
- Show them our passport to life.
- Tell them what the city to which we belong looks like
- and then show them how God’s children walk the streets of this kingdom.