

***Revelation: Strength for Today; Bright Hope for Tomorrow***  
***Great Is Thy Faithfulness***

If you knew that Jesus was coming tomorrow, what would you do today? Many of us have heard about predictions of the [quote, unquote] "end of the world" from many religious groups. Some of them call themselves Christians, some of them do not. Do you remember all the hoopla several years ago about the Mayan calendar and its so called predictions of the end of time? Well, it didn't happen as advertised, and then we were told ... *Wait! We calculated it incorrectly. It's THIS year* ... Ultimately, it wasn't even supposed to mean the end of the world, like \*poof\* be gone, but the end of the current cycle and the beginning of a new one. There are similarities with that and Revelation, and we will get to that, but back to the question.

What if you knew that Jesus was coming tomorrow, what would you do today? Does that sound like good news or bad news? Are you shaking in your boots about how much work you have left to do? How much better you'd hope to be before Jesus returned? (That's something that people who have faith in Jesus Christ don't have to be worried about, but that's another item.) Are you thinking of all the things that you would like to do in this life that you haven't gotten around to yet? *I have more friends to make. I want to reconcile this broken relationship. I want to have a relationship. I want to finish school, finish this project, see my family grow. I want to climb Mount Joseph. There's all these things that I want to do, and I haven't done them yet. I don't want to be sitting on a cloud playing the harp. That sounds BORING.*

Looking at it another way, would it cause stress and worry? Would it cause you to re-evaluate your priorities? When Martin Luther, the great Protestant reformer, was asked this question he said that he would plant a tree. *What?!*

That may seem like a strange thing if you think that Jesus coming at the end of the age means the destruction of the earth and everything in it, but this is **not** the picture that we are given at the end of Revelation.

Let's go all the way back to the beginning, back to Genesis 2:4; 8-10 where the original creation is described.

**Hear the word of the Lord!**

*2:4 This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.*

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*8 Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the [human] he had formed. 9 The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*

*10 A river watering the garden flowed from Eden...*

And now let's go to Revelation 21:1-6, from one end of the Bible to the other:

*[John says,] 21:1 Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

*5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."*

*6 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 without cost from the spring of the water of life."*

**Then, continuing on in Revelation 22:1-5:**

*22:1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. 3 No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.*

**The Word of Life.**

**Thanks be to God!**

When John is talking about a new heaven and a new earth, he is not talking about the destruction of the old. In Greek there are two words for "new" to communicate different things. One is brand new, like in Genesis, where it says that God created world. Created out of nothing. The other means more like renewed, refreshed, restored. It's just like new. *That* is the word that John uses in the Revelation passage, not a destruction and throwing away of the old with a different replacement, but a renewing of the original once the evil has been carried away.

Thinking of *that* reality, Martin Luther's answer to the question of what he would do if he *knew* Jesus was coming back tomorrow makes perfect sense. Plant a tree. Prepare for the greater life to come.

"In the beginning" after God made the Garden of Eden, we are told that God was in the Garden with Adam and Eve, at least some of the time. After the break in that relationship, humans could no longer be in the presence of God and live. In the Old Testament we learn that if people got too close to God's presence, they would die, not as a punishment *per se*, but because they didn't have adequate protection. In a way it's like being too close to the sun.

Think of the spacesuits that astronauts wear. One of the many things that they do is protect them from the heat and radiation from the sun. Without that protection, they would die. \*snap\* Have you looked at the moon lately? This past week it was especially bright here. Do you know what the temperature on the surface of the moon is? It gets up to 260° F. Water boils at 212°. We have a lot to thank God and our atmosphere for. So, approaching the sun in the wrong way will kill you. Approaching the physical presence of God in the wrong way would also kill you.

This is not a gap that we can cross on our own. Enter Jesus, God's path to direct connection/relationship with God. "The Word [Jesus] became flesh and made his dwelling among us." (John 1:14a)

But even that was limited. Only the people who came in contact or encountered Jesus directly could experience this relationship. Until Jesus' death and resurrection. Then through the Holy Spirit, it could extend to humanity. People could be filled with the Holy Spirit and basically *be* God's Temple. But, in this broken world, it is still limited.

But in this renewed earth, this new Jerusalem where evil has been destroyed forever, is the place where God and humanity can *dwell* together in harmony once more. The broken relationship has been completely restored. It is not that we are back in the Garden. It's more than the Garden. It has all of the growing things and a loving community. Those of us in a rural setting can say, *A city?! Why would a city be considered good?* One thing to remember is that John is writing directly to people who live in cities. But also, the negative things that we might associate with the city will be gone from this city.

Remember, what John is trying to do for us is to describe the indescribable, but the picture that John is trying to paint for us is that in the new heaven and earth life will be the best that you can imagine here and now in our present state ... only more so.

So, you might say, *Cherie, that all sounds great, especially after all of the evil and destruction that we heard about in the middle of Revelation, but ... How do we know that it's true?*

THAT is an excellent question. The strongest evidence that we have is the resurrection of Jesus. God entered this world in human flesh and made his dwelling among us. In Jesus, God took on ALL of the attributes of humanity apart from sin all the way through his death. The gospels take great pains to tell us that Jesus was a man who died on that cross. He wasn't pretending. He wasn't holding his breath until everyone left the room. He was dead and buried in the tomb, and on the third day ... he arose. That is it that was the day it began, the new, the renewing of creation. Everything changed.

And what is offered in this kingdom, this renewed creation as John describes in Revelation. We have abundance, whatever we need. We have freedom, most especially from sin, from evil, from death. We have healing. No more tears. No more pain. There is justice. There is equity, more than only equality. We are there in our diversity, people from every nation of God's infinite variety in humanity, and we have the unearned gift of his grace. The gift of the mercy to be there though none of us deserve it on our own.

Yet, God began it in the messiness of this current world. It was messy in Jesus' time, in John's time, and it is messy in our time. Oppression in many forms, pandemic, injustice, but still this beautiful place that God pronounced good.

We are invited to come and drink of the water of life. We see it here in Revelation, but we don't have to wait. In Isaiah 55:1 it says, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters." And in the Gospel of John 4:10, Jesus says to the woman of Samaria, "If you knew ... who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." In other words, it is available to us, now.

God invites us to be part of the kingdom now. The world is messy, and so are we, but what are we doing to display the kingdom now? What are we waiting for? Do you think you missed your chance. You have not. As it says in Lamentations 3:22-23 from the King James, "22 It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. 23 They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness." It's right out of our theme song for this series. And the song we have for the close of the worship service is glorious. You don't want to miss that, but I digress.

God's mercies are new every morning. If you think that you have messed up too much for God, guess again. Pick yourself up. Dust yourself off, and start all over again. Drink deeply from the water of life, and you too can be renewed.

What do you need from God today? Provision? This could be financial. It could simply be hope. Healing? Physical, emotional, relational, all of the above? Freedom from self-centeredness, from

a bad habit, from being concerned with what other people think of you, so that you can find your worth in God who calls you his beloved child. Do you need to feel the unearned grace of God, knowing that you cannot do it on your own, but only through the help and gift of God?

The renewed creation has already begun, so you already have that within **you**. You can access that right now. What John displays for us in Revelation is the consummation of it all.

**What is our part in this?** How do **we live** into this reality? Our part is to help John in painting these pictures for the world. We share hope and healing with others in the same way that God shares it with us.

It's like an Olympic class athlete. We have to train, so that we can be ready and seize the opportunity, so we can even recognize the opportunity in front of us. You know, realizing that you have made a difference in someone's life, even in a small way, is itself very uplifting.

It's harder to do that right now with restrictions and distancing. People working so hard to make sure that there isn't a spike in the pandemic in our local community. We don't come in contact with as many people, so it's more challenging. But there are still ways. I know that people are sending cards to each other. That is wonderful. With all the electronics - to actually receive a note from someone can be really special. To know that they took the time. They turned their thought into action. If you haven't done that, is it something that you could do?

Pick up the phone. I am terrible about phone calls. I admit it, but for those of you who enjoy visiting on the phone, have you called anyone new lately. We have a calling ministry. Have you talked to the people in your circle lately? If you're not hooked into that, let me know, in the comments, email, or ... you could even call me. I'll get you fixed up. But, don't let that stop YOU from making that call to someone else.

The Blessing Box. It's been getting a lot of business lately with a capital B. Could you drop a few things into it? Through it you would be helping people in great need. They may not even realize that you are sharing the love of God with them, but you are. Just think of all of the things that God does for us that we usually don't notice.

There are things that you can do. One thing that I've learned through this pandemic is that you all have better, more creative, ideas than I do. So as your official encourager, I urge you to go for it. Do those things that you can safely do. Spread the Good News of the Kingdom.

Train by reading your Bible. I know of one person who is considering taking an online class. This person studies in a wide variety of ways. Maybe this could be an idea for you too. Make the

most of what you can do now. When that light flows out of you, it helps others, but it also helps you. Let your life reflect the Kingdom of God.

Then, in this coming reality, we won't be less of ourselves. We will be more, the best parts of ourselves only better. God calls you his children. Take that strength and hope.

The Bible is a story, a true story, about God. It is also about us. It is a love story about the One who loves us so much, but must wait for us to mature, to have the experiences that make us ready for the final culmination of it all. Then we find that all of this has been the prologue, the introduction to the bigger story that goes on ... forever.

"Jesus says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen." (Rev 22:20-21)