

5th Sunday of Easter 4/24/16
Revelation 21:1-7 C

“BEHOLD, THE DWELLING PLACE OF GOD IS WITH MAN. HE WILL DWELL WITH THEM, AND THEY WILL BE HIS PEOPLE, AND GOD HIMSELF WILL BE WITH THEM AS THEIR GOD.”

I wonder if those who died in the earthquake in Ecuador, now numbering over 500, went to bed knowing it would be the last time they ever slept in their beds. I wonder if those 14 workers killed by their fellow worker and his wife in San Bernardino, CA, went to work the morning of December 2, 2015, thinking more about getting their children to daycare or the morning commuter traffic so they wouldn't be late for work, than realizing it would be their last day on earth. On September 11, 2001, I'm guessing most people were most likely thinking about not missing their flight, rather than this would be the day of their death.

You have most likely heard the words of Benjamin Franklin or a paraphrase of his words, “In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.” Honestly, you don't have to pay your taxes. You may end up in jail, but you really don't have to pay taxes, if you don't want to. On this side of heaven, we can take nothing for granted, not even life itself. The only thing we have for certain is death.

In this season of Easter, we rejoice. We rejoice because the Easter resurrection of Jesus means that our home is the new Jerusalem of heaven. St. John teaches us in our Epistle reading from the book of Revelation:

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. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their

eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

To understand why God will create a “new” heaven and a “new” earth to be our home, we must go back to the Garden of Eden. God created everything and pronounced it “good”. That meant there was no sin, there was nothing to curse our lives; and there was certainly no death. And, we walked with God.

But, then came the fall. And what was the first thing Adam and Eve did in sin? They hid from God. Separation. Adam blamed God; Eve blamed the serpent. Sin separates. Sin separated us from God; sin separates us from one another; sin separates us from the ‘goodness’ of creation; and, ultimately, sin separates our mortal body from our eternal soul. That is the final wages of sin.

Jesus talked about the separation that sin brings this way in our Gospel, ‘A little while, and you will see Me no longer, and again a little while, and you will see Me...You will be sorrowful’. Fellow saints, we find ourselves in that “little while” that Jesus talked about. This “little while” is our earthly life, the time of walking by faith through the valley of the shadow of death. Now is the time of grief, the time of weeping and mourning.

In the wee hours of Wednesday morning, the Amber Alert wakened us, as it may have you as well, telling us that a 13-month-old girl had been abducted from her home in Poplar, MT. As the morning turned into afternoon Wednesday, the news came that little Kenzley had been found dead. Do I even need to ask the question? How depraved a mind would it take to kill a 13-month-old child?

Eight family members killed in Ohio. A 16-year-old Delaware high school sophomore died after a fight in a high school bathroom. Terrorist

attacks, theft, vandalism, greed, jealousy, hatred, and division. Earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, famines, and fires. Surgeries, hospitalizations, chemotherapy, radiation and all manner of treatments. Injustice, pain, sadness, and loneliness.

Why do we need a new home? Because in the fall into sin, sin cursed God's good creation, filling our lives with trouble, trials, and tears. And that means that we cannot take anything for granted, not even life itself.

II. God says in our lesson, "I am making everything new!" The Good News of the Christian faith is that God makes all things new including a new home for us to live in with Him, a home where righteousness and glory dwell.

But, before we believe the lie of Satan or our own human reason that we are entitled to heaven or that we can earn our way in heaven by being "nice," let us remember that we are by nature sinful and unclean. Heaven and life there is ours because of Jesus.

The GOOD NEWS of the Gospel is that our sin, which separated us from God, whose wages was death, which condemned us to eternal death, was all laid on Jesus. The very Son of God paid the price of our sin with His innocent suffering and His death upon the cross, so that all of our sin would be gone in His sin-cleansing blood. He died and was buried, but the 3rd day He burst the tomb's dark portal, bringing life and immortality to light for us.

III. In this season of Easter, our epistle lessons from Revelation have all focused on what Christ's resurrection means for us. Christ has risen from death and the grave. One with Him by our baptism in Him, we die with Christ and the Easter resurrection of Christ means that we will rise to eternal life in Christ.

Look at what God Himself says in our lesson, "The dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them." As we walk by faith through this valley

of the shadow of death, the good news for us is that we are strangers here, heaven is our home. Our deliverance from this vale of tears is sure and certain in the resurrection and ascension of Christ. Heaven is our home, our hope, our joy, our peace, and our comfort.

And look at what else God says from His throne, “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.”

What does that mean? It means that this present age, this great tribulation, this awful, hectic, miserable, wretched tribulation is over. No more slaughter in war, school shootings, or terrorist attacks. No more murders, rapes, gossip, envy, greed, jealousy, hatred, and division among people. No more injustice, pain, sadness, loneliness. No more visits to doctor’s offices, surgeries, chemotherapy, IV’s. No more caskets, funerals, graveside committal services.

The Apostle Paul quotes Isaiah the Prophet, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him (1 Cor 2:9).”

The words of our hymn echo the words of Paul:

“We know not, oh, we know not
What joys await us there:
The radiancy of glory,
The bliss beyond compare (LSB 672:1).

Our citizenship, our home, is in heaven. The promise of a new heaven and a new earth in our epistle is God’s promise to us. Although life in this age is marked by confusion, chaos, uncertainty, conflict, and death, God is drawing this age to a close. That is news of great joy for you and for me. God will make a new creation and renew His people as a new Jerusalem. And we will dwell with God and His Son, forever, and ever, without end.

But even now, in the time of our grief, Jesus is with us. “I am with you always, to the very end of the age,” He promised. Baptized and living in Him, Jesus dwells with and in us, helping us, strengthening us, upholding us, until that time that He comes to take us to be with Him in heaven. Luther so beautifully puts it this way in his Small Catechism:

“We pray in this petition, in summary, that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally, when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.”