

“A New Way for a New Day”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Congregational Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts
May 15, 2022 – Fifth Sunday of Easter
Revelation 21:1-6; John 13:31-35

It sure seems like we've turned a corner, moving on from what has been a mostly chilly spring towards the warmth of summer. Yesterday, we got up above 90 degrees, which was over 30 degrees warmer than it was a week ago, and it sure felt like a summer day, didn't it? My hope is that we have more of these summerlike days ahead of us. The good news from my dear friends at the Weather Channel is that the coming days, though they may not be as balmy as yesterday was, are sure to be pleasantly warm. Hallelujah!

But we know that the seasons will change again as our slightly tilted planet makes its annual trip around the sun. While we cannot be sure of weather that we will experience each day, no matter the weather we hope to enjoy, we can be absolutely sure that the seasons will continue in their ever-changing ways, for this is fixed in the character of the good Earth lovingly created by God.

Today's lesson from Revelation continues our Easter season series of readings from this good book, and we are provided in this passage one of the most beautiful scenes in our scriptures. Pastor John shares with us the vision that was shared with him of a new heaven and a new earth, in which the old ways of sin, death, and sorrow are no more, and people live united with God and one another in peace. In this vision, we see the completion of the good work that God began in the beginning, when God began to conquer the chaos of the abyss by calling the good and blessed world to form; filling it with light, color, fruit, and fantastic beasts of every kind; and starting its steadfast, slightly tilted march around the sun.

We know all too well that we who dwell on earth have not enjoyed the goodness and beauty of what God has created as God has intended for us to enjoy. While there is great beauty and goodness, there is also brokenness and ugliness as people throughout time have behaved selfishly and with violence towards other people and the beautiful planet and its creatures. People have differing explanations for human brokenness, which we see in stories, such as the one from our religious tradition of Eve and Adam and munching on the forbidden fruit

in the garden of Eden and becoming separated from God and the life God intended for them to enjoy through their rebellious act, or complex theories of human nature that don't involve a power beyond people, such as the ideas of Sigmund Freud, who taught that acts of human brokenness flow from forces struggling within each of us. There are as many differing explanations for human brokenness as there are humans, but we can all agree that there is a very big problem and that people throughout the world hurt and are in need because of it.

And the problem has played out, sure as the seasons, over and over again, in so many heartbreaking ways throughout human history. The sad story, which is as old as time, continues in our time, with our selfish acts causing harm to ourselves and others in small ways and in big ways, as we sadly see in the news every day. But John gives us a vision of a new day when there will be a new way, when people turn a corner and are no longer separated from one another and God by their brokenness, but are made whole and are at peace.

The good news for us this Easter season is that this new day and its new way are not just some ancient dream of a glorious future, but are already created for us to enjoy, that we might drink now from the spring of the water of life. While we stand now with a foot firmly planted on this old earth, as an Easter people, united with the resurrected Christ, we also have our other foot resting on a new earth. Indeed, while we are residents of the earthly realm, with its brokenness and limitations, we are also citizens of a heavenly realm, a new Jerusalem, with its glorious and eternal perfection. We stand, therefore, in a liminal space, between heaven and earth, the imperfect and the perfect, the broken and the whole, the temporal and the eternal.

From this place, we can reach into the eternal and pull the new way of God into our old world and so continue God's work of making things new. We do this most perfectly when we enact the new commandment of Jesus, which is really an old commandment imperfectly followed and so needs to be reissued each new day: We should love one another.

This is the new way of the new day: To love selflessly as Christ loved us -- giving and not grabbing, building and not breaking, healing and not hurting. Love is the way of paradise. Can we regain it? When paradise is lost as we engage in the madness of war, unleash our rage in yet another mass shooting, speak or write

words of hate against our neighbor, or seek to limit the rights and freedoms of others, we can work to repair and rebuild our old world with the new way of love.

So as this Easter season goes on, and the days continue to become warmer and sunnier, may we be bringing warmth, brightness, and new life to the world as we follow the life-giving way of heaven, the way of love. Amen.