

“Alpha, Omega, and Omicron”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Congregational Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts

May 29, 2022 – Seventh Sunday of Easter

Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21; John 17:20-26

In today’s lesson from the Revelation of John, we read the final words in our canon of scripture, in which Pastor John shares with his congregations, and with us, the final words spoken to him in a vision by Jesus the eternal Christ. Jesus exclaims that he is the Alpha, which is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and the Omega, which is the last letter. He is the first and the last, the A and Z, the beginning and the end. But Christ is not only the Alpha, the source of our lives, and the Omega, the one with whom we will have perfect fellowship at the end of our days on earth, but Christ is also to be found in the messy middle of the alphabet, in times like these days of Omicron, during which we struggle together as we now live with a very unwelcome but persistent viral visitor.

Sadly, since I preached last Sunday about another of our current struggles in the messy middle that we just can’t seem to shake, the problem of the violence that we see in mass shooting after mass shooting, there have been seven more mass shootings in America, including the heartbreaking shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, in which 19 children and two teachers’ lives were taken from them, their families, and their community.

This terrible event was caused and made worse by many factors, some of which we’re still learning about, but we know for sure that the suffering of so many was caused by a young person who was able to buy the weapon he used, an AR-15-style weapon, modeled on a weapon of war, to fire over 100 bullets at children, teachers, and law enforcement officers.

An angry gunman’s access to this kind of weapon is one major factor in the shooting. But these are in many places easy to access. There are more guns in the United States today than there are people. Due to the proliferation of guns, especially like the one the Uvalde shooter used, which is designed specifically to rapidly kill many people, the lack of adequate safety measures used on many of them, and easy access to them by many who seek to harm others or themselves, we are experiencing an epidemic of gun violence. Sadly, bullets are now the

leading cause of death for children in America, where more children than police officers die each year from a bullet.

Our national leaders, too many of whom are more concerned about maintaining their powerful jobs than making sacrifices to enact sensible laws concerning our weapons that would best serve all people, fail to enact popularly supported measures that would effectively reduce the numbers of children and others whose lives are harmed or ended by the pull of a trigger.

Instead, we sorrowfully grieve (again), we burn with anger (again), we bicker bitterly (again), and we offer our “thoughts and prayers” (again), but the only real changes we make are that we buy even more weapons of war, enabling even more destruction, and we continue to increase the number of times we use them to harm one another. If we believe the words of Christ in the Revelation, that he is coming soon to judge people according to their works, we are in danger, for by our violent ways and our enabling of them, we deserve God’s wrath rather than God’s blessing.

But the good news we find in Revelation is that we can wash our robes, no matter how filthy and blood-stained they have become. We are invited, no matter who we are or where we’ve been on life’s journey, to come and drink from the heavenly waters that give life. However we’ve torn ourselves away from others, and torn ourselves apart, we are able, by the indwelling and empowering Spirit of the Alpha and Omega, who is with us even now in this time of Omicron, to tie knots that bind us together with others and to tie other knots that bind others together. We are able, when we act out of sacrificial, selfless love, just as Christ did on our behalf, to become bound together and made more whole. If we can find a way to turn from our violent ways, and take instead the path of love, we, as individuals and as a people, can see our wounds begin to heal, our pain lessened, and so much that causes our sorrow to cease.

This all starts at home, with each of us choosing to act out of love for our neighbors and ourselves, even when we don’t feel like it, even when we feel the competing urges within us pulling us over to the way of selfishness.

We all face many difficulties in life, many of them seemingly too large to overcome or difficult to endure, and we may feel hopelessly trapped by them, rendered unable to act as we know we should or would like to act. But the

problems that we face as individuals, the problems that we endure as a society, the problems that exist on a global scale, and the problems we encounter as a community of faith, no matter how great, are no match for the One who is the Alpha and the Omega, the Bright Morning Star, who came to save us and continues to come to save us where we live in the messy middle. In the good words of the United Church of Canada's 1968 affirmation of faith, "In life, in death, in life beyond death, we are not alone. Thanks be to God."

Let us take hope in this. The One who made us loves us too much to leave us alone to destroy ourselves and is with us on every step of our journey, actively calling us to take steps that leads to life. God enables our growth by giving us all that we need to take these steps towards more life, including this community of faith, which is a blessing of God given to us to help us on our journey. We can find the support we need here and in our other supportive relationships, for God works through each of us to help one another along and to push together for the creation of a more just and loving society.

May the Alpha and Omega be with us this day in the messy middle and move us towards more life. Amen.