

“Beginning New and Ending New”
Revelation 21:1-6
Rev. David Hutchinson
Sunday, May 19, 2019

Do you ever feel like God is WITH you?

Do you feel like that ALL the time?

Ever?

When - - you're sleeping - - and when you're awake?

This morning's scripture reading from the book of Revelation says that:

“The dwelling of God is with people”

This scripture reading shows us a VISION.

It's a vision that John had - - of everything as it WILL be - - as it SHOULD be.

And IN this vision - - God is WITH people.

John had this vision - - when he was ALONE - - in PRISON.

In the Bible account John is imprisoned on an island.

He is imprisoned because of his faith.

And in the depths of his island prison - - comes this vision.

If you have ever read the whole book you know - - a lot of crazy stuff comes first!

Beasts - - and wars - - and violence - - and pain...

But - - - in a world where EVIL roams like a dragon...

And from the depths of a prison...

John had a vision of God being WITH us!

And - - he sat alone in prison - - and thought about God being WITH him.

wow

I was thinking about this last week.

During one of those SUNNY - - WARM days.

Do you remember those?

It was - - so beautiful.

How could God NOT be with us - - I thought.

But how about on those dreary - - rainy - - cloudy days - - - too?

How about - - all the time?

That is what God - - seems to really want.

According to this vision...God wants to be with us.

God wants to be IN the world.

The scripture reading for this morning says:

“The dwelling of God is WITH us”

It’s NOT that WE go UP to heaven.

It’s that GOD - - comes DOWN to earth.

That’s John’s vision.

It happened ONE other time in the Bible:

In the manger in Bethlehem.

At Jesus BIRTH - - we hear about EMMANUEL.

WHO - - people had been WAITING for since the prophet ISAIAH!

Emmanuel means “God WITH us”

And during some of the most CHAOTIC times for Israel...

As the empire of Assyrian THREATENED to INVADE....

And national leadership was going the wrong direction...

During times like that - - 700 years BEFORE Jesus...

The prophet Isaiah had a vision of "GOD WITH US" - - it's in chapter 7.

We read about that vision from Isaiah 7 during the season of Advent.

And early followers of Jesus - - saw Jesus as an answer to those longings.

However...

Even after Jesus died...

Even after Jesus ROSE...

The world - - as WE know it - - remains.

This vision of God WITH people - - seems to be still - - incomplete.

But John's vision - - hangs out there - - calling to us.

Have HOPE!

Live with hope and faith.

God WANTS - - to be WITH people.

God wants the world - - made NEW.

John's vision says there will be a NEW heaven - - AND - - A NEW EARTH.

Whenever I start thinking about heaven - - I have a lot of QUESTIONS.

The Bible doesn't say a LOT about heaven. / The book of Revelation DOES.

But it's still - - mysterious.

It's like I'm singing the old song "God Shuffled His Feet". Anyone know it?:

"Do you have to eat - - or get your hair cut in heaven?"

And if your EYE gets poked out in THIS life...

Would it be waiting for you - - up in heaven with your wife?"

In the song - - people ask these questions while on a picnic with God.

Wouldn't that be great!

God gathers us all for a picnic.

On one of those nice warm sunny days.

And we enjoy the afternoon - - together.

And on the picnic God answers all our questions.

Essentially - - what all the questions in the SONG are about is:

WILL WE - - be somehow made NEW - - by our experience of heaven?

I mean - - IF God is going to make a new heaven and a new EARTH - -

Why - - BOTHER - - dwelling with US?

Why sit around with US?

Why Emmanuel?

Why be with us?

Apparently - - we have a choice to make in all this.

Something like - - will we give ourselves over - - to what God is doing?

But - - even if we won't - - God is COMING!

SO - - - Here's a globe.

The earth - - as we know it - - more or less.

The earth - - as we EXPECT to see it.

IF you could go DOWN and DESCEND on to it - - and get closer and closer...

Get smaller and smaller...

And start to see streets - - and trees - - and people... wow...

And then - - all the same old stuff...

Crime and violence - - love and hate - - drunk driving - - litter...

So this is our earth - - as it is now.

Full of - - all or our - - HOT air!

But God - - will make a NEW earth - - the vision says.

God will squeeze out all of OUR hot air and crime and hate....

BUT - - God will NOT leave us like THIS:

Deflated and hopeless.

God will make a NEW earth.

Different - - but NEW.

Not destroyed - - but REDEEMED.

Resurrected.

AND - - WE will be made new as well.

Think about the things in your life - - you would LIKE to change.

Salvation - - doesn't just TRASH you.

Imagine being REMADE.

IT could be painful - - and we sometimes resist it - - but think...

Think of what COULD be!

Think for a minute - - of just how PEOPLE you LOVE - - have changed you.

My MOM changed me in lots of ways.

And things in life changed her.

She got breast cancer.

And Alzheimer's.

And she was forever changed by these things.

And yet - - she IS and will always be - - my MOM.

Well - - if we change each other...

And if - - life and pain change us...

What about the changes GOD wants to make?

According to Revelation - - one CHANGE will be - - NO more TEARS.

The former things will pass away.

Newness will come to us.

The rock star Eric Clapton wrote a song about this called:

“Tears in Heaven”

The song comes out of his struggle to accept this idea - - of no more tears - - AFTER the death of his son - - at four years old. / In the song he begins by asking some of HIS questions.

He asks:

“Would you know my name - - if I saw you in heaven?

Would it BE the SAME - - if I saw you in heaven?”

But in the song he comes to this vision - - of hope...

“There is PEACE I’m sure - - and I know that there will be - - no more tears in heaven.”

It is difficult to FATHOM - - the depth of GOD’s love for us.

It’s difficult to fathom the MYSTERIES - - of a new heaven and a new earth.

But ultimately - - this vision - - is a vision of HOPE.

The vision - - in the Revelation to John - - is a TRIUMPH!

It is not the typical worldly kind of triumph - - but a triumph nevertheless.

Remember Jesus - - riding on the DONKEY on Palm Sunday?

Jesus rode TRIUMPHANTLY - - on a donkey.

Jesus did NOT ride in on a WHITE horse!

Not - - until NOW.

In the book of Revelation - - the power of the Roman soldiers is defeated.

The oppressive - - violent forces - - that ride white horses have been REPLACED!

Jesus - - is on the white horse - - in chapter 19.

Which means - - WE should be careful of riding white horses.

Let Jesus do that.

And HOLD on to the HOPE - - that only JESUS belongs there.

The triumph of GOD over EVIL is NOT something to be triumphalistic about.

IT is the very FOUNDATION - - of our HUMILITY - - and our HOPE.

God - - WANTS - - to be WITH us.

To make us new.

Go back to the book of Genesis as we end for today...

In the BEGINNING - - God created the heavens and the earth.

And God said, "This is GOOD"

And in the end - - God will create - - and make new.

And it will be GOOD.

Amen.