

***A sermon preached by the Rev. Hugh E. Brown, III, D. Min, MSW, LSW, Rector,
in All Saints Episcopal Church, Princeton, NJ on May 15, 2022, the 5th Sunday
of Easter, on Revelation 21: 1-6***

Seize the Whole of Life and Build God's Glory There!

"See the home of God is among mortals!"

I have often read the words from the 21st Chapter of Revelation during the *Burial Offices* of the Episcopal Church.

We can certainly find comforting words in the 21st Chapter of Revelation.

"God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

"Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more; for the first things have passed away."

What do you hear in these words?

Here are some faith consolations families have shared with me.

"God Himself will be with them."

Families have shared words such as: "We are not alone. God is with us."

So true; yet sometimes so hard to trust.

"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Families have shared words with me such as: "Grief is hard but things will get better; joy comes in the morning."

I think God can wipe the tears away—but I also, dear friends, believes God continues to honor the tears.

Grief is a life-long journey I think.

Revelation, Chapter 21--- can especially bear a promise when life's end is physically difficult.

“Mourning and Pain will be no more”

Yes, So many families have found comfort in the promise of eternal life for those they love.

But also, families have found comfort with the end of death in this world....

.....the death of walking with a loved one in illness that seems to have no end to pain.....dementia.....Alzheimer's.....late stage chronic illness like cancer, heart disease.....neurological illness that seems to take all away.

We can often use theological language like “new creation,” “redemption,” “salvation” in an abstract way.

Grief; loss; the journey through the valley of the shadow of death—makes religion; Christianity; Christ—so much more real.

All the more reason for the promise of comfort in Revelation, Chapter 21

Perhaps even more than comfort; real, honest to goodness, support.

Support.

Yes, it is often said that funerals are for the living—not just the dead.

I want to call the congregations' attention to a special service on Memorial Day Sunday at 5PM here at All Saints church.

Next Sunday, May 29th at 5PM, we will be offering a Requiem

Eucharist.....including the beautiful music of Gabriel Faure'

We will be doing so..... to especially honor seven members of our parish family for whom we have not had chance to commend to God's care, with a Memorial service; and a sacred rite.

They are: **Anne Bottomley, Catharine Brett-Smith, Tink Evans, Lib Flemer, Kay Johnson, David Soncrant, and Dick Williams.**

One profound manifestation of the COVID pandemic's cruelty.....was its negation of the Church's ability to safely offer supportive meaningful rituals.... for grief.

We hope to finally create a meaningful parish rite of passage to eternal life for families who continue to grieve loss.

Yes, the words of Revelation, Chapter 21 offer words of hope, comfort and promise.

The offer a vision of eternal life.

The offer pastoral support to those navigating grief... in this life.

But we can't stop there.

For the 21st Chapter of Revelation is not only a word of consolation.

It is not only a word of comfort and support.

It is also a hope for a changed world.

This one.

In the words of our Lord's Prayer: *On earth. As it is in heaven.*

Your bulletin cover depicts a vision of The New Jerusalem.

We think...again.. of the words of Revelation: "*See the home of God is among mortals.*"

The artist is Jewish.

We might note that the wall of the temple is restored; that is a vision of the Messianic reign in Jewish thought.

But you might also note the beautiful rendering of a new city in light behind the wall. Y

You might also note the assembly of persons gathered in peace.

The New Jerusalem.....the New Heaven and Earth.....as envisioned by the artist.....Alex Levin-is a vision of Peace.

The vision, the hope, the change—is about this world.

Not just the next one.

We opened the service with a hymn by Walter Russell Bowie.

Bowie authored texts for hymns in the early to mid-20th century.

We might consider them, the hymnology of the Social Gospel.

The Social Gospel.

Those in the Social Gospel Movement believed that God's Kingdom was moving NOW—on this side of life.

The Social Gospel movement was about social reform, social change; social transformation.

The Social Gospel, brought Christianity into the world of the early 20th century: it called for Labor Rights, the 8-hour Day; and end to child labor; clean food and drink, ending poverty; ending the great cleavages of wealth and class.

For many years, Paul Rauschenbusch, served as Director and Chaplain of the Princeton University Chapel.

His grandfather was the one of the great preachers, theologians and pioneers of the Social Gospel: Walter Rauschenbusch.

What was the spiritual and theological message of the Social Gospel?

God is Building a new World Now.

We are called to participate in its creation.

This was not a human project; this was God's work.

But we are co-creators of God for the building of God's Kingdom on earth.

The great hymn writer, Walter Russell Bowie put this theology into music.

I have always found the best of music and the arts as the building of a new humanity, a new creation.

Listen to the words of our opening Hymn, the 21st Chapter of Revelation—set to music.

Listen to its hope for a new creation.

What is this hope?

Where Christ the Lamb reigns; not just the Passover lamb sacrificed.

But the lamb of God bringing justice and peace.

A city within whose four-square walls shall come, no might, no need, nor pain.

A city where there is not shame, nor contentment with streets, shops, and tenements wringing gold from human pain.

Where Christ has not died in vain.

Not the vanity of disbelief in eternal life.

But disbelief in the possibility of restored human relations in this life.

Yes, writes Bowie:

*“Give us O God the strength to build the city that hath stood, too long a dream
whose laws are love, whose crown is servanthood, and where the sun that shineth
is God’s grace for human good.*

*And Yes, within the mind of God that city riseth fair—challenging the souls who
greatly dare, to size the whole of life and build its glory there.”*

Yes, the souls that greatly dare to size life to build the glory of God are with us.

A great Episcopalian, a social worker, was inspired by the Social Gospel.

She dreamed of that New Jerusalem, translated into public policy.

Her name was Francis Perkins.

She wanted the words of the opening hymn by Walter Russell Bowie----the words
of the Social Gospel---- to govern the cities of our nation.

She became the Secretary of Labor for Franklin Roosevelt—the first woman to
hold a cabinet level position in American government.

And she became the architect of the Social Security Act.

Due to Perkins and others the entire foundation of what semblance we have a
social safety net was forged by those great souls who dared to seize the whole of
life for God’s glory.

This work was not politics or policy for Perkins.

It was Revelation 21 in action.

It was Gospel.

Not a work of humanity fundamentally.

We don't need insurrection, revelation and bloodshed.

We don't even need ideological repression of left or right.

We don't need polarized religion that seeks to divide and conquer-- to bring a new heaven and earth into being.

We simply need those----in the spirit of Francis Perkins----who dare to see the new Heaven and a New Earth-----envision what is already in the mind of God---and seize the whole of life for God's glory.

Revelation 21 moves today in all working for the city....

.....dreamed by John,

.....brought to earth with Jesus and with mortals as we worship,

.....where law is love.....

.....crowns are servanthood...

.....God's grace is for human good.

A few years ago, Elly and I were fortunate to attend the last public concert—at MacCarer Theater--.of a true lady of the New Jerusalem—the singer, song-writer Joan Baez.

She wrote a song called, Jerusalem.

I ask you to observe the art by Alex Lavine on your bulletin cover as I read the words of Joan's song: Jerusalem.

They are especially poignant as we witness yet another horrific act of violence in the name of hate yesterday—in Buffalo, NY.

They are especially truthful to the reality of war and violence in Ukraine, in Palestine, in Jerusalem...in so much of the human family.

But they are also true to the dream of so many who work for the New Jerusalem.

Another dream of that City....where laws are love and crowns are servanthood.

The text of the Joan Baez song, *Jerusalem*, reads:

I woke up this mornin' and none of the news was good

And death machines were rumblin' 'cross the ground where Jesus stood

And the man on my TV told me that it had always been that way

And there was nothin' anyone could do or say

And I almost listened to him

Yeah, I almost lost my mind

Then I regained my senses again

And looked into my heart to find

That I believe that one fine day all the children of Abraham

Will lay down their swords forever in Jerusalem

Well maybe I'm only dreamin' and maybe I'm just a fool

But I don't remember learnin' how to hate in Sunday school

But somewhere along the way I strayed and I never looked back again

But I still find some comfort now and then

Then the storm comes rumblin' in

And I can't lay me down

And the drums are drummin' again

And I can't stand the sound

But I believe there'll come a day when the lion and the lamb

Will lie down in peace together in Jerusalem

And there'll be no barricades then

There'll be no wire or walls

And we can wash all this blood from our hands

And all this hatred from our souls

And I believe that on that day all the children of Abraham

Will lay down their swords forever in Jerusalem

Yes see, dear friends, the Home of God IS among Mortals.

God WILL dwell with them as THEIR God.