

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

All Saints

Sermon Reflection Notes

This Sunday we celebrated All Saints' Day (also on Thursday Evening, October 31), and we remembered the people from our faith community who have died during the past year. We also remembered, in the church universal, all the communion of saints who have gone before us.

Appropriately, the scripture text for our remembering was Revelation 21:1-6 – a text from the last book of our Scripture – a book often left behind by much of the church, primarily because the genre of the book is apocalyptic, replete with amazing visions and God's righteous judgment poured out against the enemies of God and God's people. Apocalyptic material is scattered throughout Scripture. Apocalyptic material addresses situations of crisis, to explain how God is still in charge even though God's faithful people are suffering from persecution. Apocalyptic material sought to offer assurance and hope in difficult times. It encouraged and admonished the faithful to hang tough and hold tight!

So perhaps the most important context for understanding Revelation has to do with its original pastoral concern to address the suffering and persecution of Christian believers - to reassure and encourage their hope for God's redemption. And so, this text still offers hope to all who are suffering – those of us who are living through loss and grief, but also all of us who live in a world of war, fear, chaos, humanitarian crises, and natural disasters. As Pastor Ron said, apocalyptic literature was a common literary genre that used vivid imagery to describe a cosmic battle between good and evil. It's a book which proclaims that while life is hard, God will make things right. At its core, Revelation is a book of hope.

Revelation proclaims that God will make all things new. Both heaven and earth will be made new. Revelation proclaims that God's home is with us, that God is always moving toward us, and God will have the final word. And the last word from God is always new life. We can trust our living and our dying to that promise of new life!

Scripture

Revelation 21:1-6a (NRSVUE)

¹ 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. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home[a] of God is among mortals. He will dwell[b] with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and be their God; ⁴ he will wipe 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."

⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

Discussion Questions

1. What will you remember from this sermon? Did the sermon evoke new thoughts for you? Did the sermon evoke questions for you?
2. Why and how is Revelation used and misused?
3. Where is apocalyptic language being used today?
4. Pastor Ron said that what we discover in the Revelation text is that everything will be made new, and that implies we have responsibility, with God, for all things becoming new. What does that mean in living a life following Jesus?
5. We heard, in the sermon, about Richard Rohr's writing, where Rohr says that the story of God's work has never been about escaping earth and going up to heaven. It has always been about God descending to dwell among us. Does this statement change your perception about God's relationship with us, about death, about what you may have been taught in the past?
6. So, as we recall the lives of the saints who have gone before us, we do so with hope. In your experience, what makes a person become a person of hope rather than a person filled with fear and bitterness? How do we learn to be people of hope?

Closing Prayer

Holy God, kingdoms rage, empires tremble, and the earth seems to be crumbling. But you speak words of assurance. You speak, and you call people like us to be your agents in this tottering world. You summon us to notice where we can be obedient, where we can live like Jesus, where we can speak a word of hope. You come to live among us, and we are in awe of your presence. We are grateful. We pray always in the name of Jesus. Amen.

"I've read the end of the book. We win." Desmond Tutu