

## **Year C-Easter 5-2019-Water to the Thirsty**

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**Revelation 21:1-6, John 13:31-35**

### **Water to the Thirsty**

The Seer 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.” The old had been a lot like New York, Paris or Portland, governed by contending political forces where the one with the most power got to make the rules. But the New Jerusalem was coming from a different place---the Seer describes her as coming from Heaven, God’s place, that place beyond human rivalry where it is clear who sits on the throne. It was God who sits there and the Lamb is with Him. Even the elders and the four living creatures bowed their heads toward the throne and sang praises to God.

Now the imagery changes from the Cosmos of heaven and earth to the most intimate and hopeful of family events, a wedding. The New Jerusalem, coming down from heaven, is prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. With this, a collage of images appears for me as I picture a young Asian Indian woman bedecked with Jewels and bangles that somehow combines with an African woman, her face beautifully painted in intricate patterns, and then finishes with a radiant young woman dressed in white appearing at the doorway of our church prepared to meet her groom.

Suddenly I find my auditory faculties engaged. The Seer says, “And then I heard a loud voice from the throne,” -- but wait I am going to interrupt this loud voice with some comments and a question. First the comment: The throne is the place of ultimate authority, the highest place, the truth about which there is no debate or dispute. We humans need a “highest” authority to coordinate ourselves and to keep from falling into dispute and violence with each other. The all-important question is who that “highest” authority is and what methods get used to maintain authority, love or force.

The passage from the Gospel of John also bears on authority and how one manages it. Jesus has just left the upper room when he says, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him.” Glorification really means having one’s reputation lifted up. When Jesus is lifted up on the cross and we start seeing the meaning of that lifting up, the Son of Man will be glorified for we will see that it was all done in love. Knowing that Jesus came from God, this act of Jesus will also glorify God. And God needs this glorification because prior to Jesus, God’s reputation among humans was violent, retributive and jealous rather than loving and kind. So Jesus glorified God by straightening out God’s reputation.

Back to the Book of Revelation and my question: What do we think this loud voice coming from the throne will say? We often think, without thinking, that the highest authority is going to threaten us and tell us to be good or else. But that's not John's vision. Here what the voice says:

See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them.

Strangely, this always comes as a surprise to us. God's home is among us mortals? We know this with our heads but often it doesn't reside in our hearts. We may think him among us but our hearts say he is distant. All of scripture, or at least scripture seen as a whole, attempt to communicate that God's home is here but that seems difficult for us to feel. Perhaps we hold too much enmity toward our enemy to feel God's eternal love toward us.

Secondly, I noticed this passage says they will be his peoples. I expected it to read "they will be his people," but it doesn't. It puts it in the plural. He is not talking about one tribe, one nationality, one country; he is talking about all humanity. He dealt with the problem of "us" and "them" by making all people "us."

My instinctual heart says he loves me and my people but not those others who are so different from me. I am discovering that my instinctual heart is often wrong and needs to be converted. My instinctual heart sees in ways it was trained to see by the culture in which I was formed, but that doesn't necessarily make it into a heart that sees reality or sees as God sees. My instinctual heart has needed expanding and that process continues. "They will be his peoples" nudges me off my pedestal of "I am the way, the truth, and the life," rather than Christ.

But I have not finished reading to you what this loud voice from the throne said. While we think loud voices from thrones are cold and distant, this voice gets more intimate, tender, and soft "the more we listen to it. "He will wipe every tear from their eyes." Isn't that a beautiful image? God leans down and gently dabs the tears from our eyes. "It is going to be all right," he says. I'm here, I love you. I see you and I see your tears.

And so that sentence ends and another begins, "Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." It's so beautiful we can barely take it in. Its' tenderness melts us. We find ourselves relaxing because we don't have to fend off death in all its forms. The first things, those things we have been contending against all our lives, "will be no more." It seems to be too good to be true but the loud voice from the throne tells us it is.

How important can a trade war be? And do the screaming headlines really proclaim truth? The Book of Revelation was written in and for strident times that tempt us to give them our hearts, pulling us into fear.

“And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’” To my ear his voice is softer now. He has captured my attention and lifted me out of my fear. I am ready to hear now with more belief, openness and courage than before. Maybe God really is making all things new in ways bigger than we can understand.

There is an addendum to the message from the throne given in John the Seer’s vision. The message reads like this: “Also he said, ‘Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.’” We humans have always struggled with words; with what we are being told, with which words we can trust and which were designed to mislead us and put us in the design and service of others. Truth and false truth, how do we tell one from another? John the Seer, in his God-given vision knows about this. And so he says, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true. Then he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.’”

God has revealed himself in the face of our skepticism and unbelief. It is done! God has completed creation so that now we have the key that unlocks the door to our tendency toward violence. It is done! Now we know, since Jesus we know what before we could not decipher. It is done! The Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end has declared it.

And then one final promise, a phrase that sums it up and causes our cup to run over with blessing: “To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the springs of the water of life.” As I think about that and meditate on it in my mind and heart, it is almost more than I can hold. Thanks be to God. Amen.