

## You Are Invited

Rev. 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21

The Bible starts, “In the beginning God created...” And the book of Genesis opens the door to a biblical library and the story of ancient Israel’s covenant with Yahweh, their rise and fall, exile and homecoming. It continues with the story of a new covenant of Jesus as the fulfillment of the expectation of Messiah and includes the very beginnings of the Christian Church with letters from Paul and others. Finally, it contains the New Testament’s contribution to apocalyptic literature, the book of Revelation.

Today’s scripture reading is from the very end of that book and the very end of the Bible. The biblical library ends as it began, with a story of creation. The heavens and earth have passed away. A new heaven and new earth have been revealed—an existence in God’s very presence, God with us.

There are a wide variety of interpretations how this new creation will manifest itself. Some believe Jesus will come back to earth literally, a second coming in physical form, to reign here and begin a process culminating in the new creation. Others believe that the second coming has already happened through the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts tells about the Spirit’s coming at Pentecost. In John’s gospel, Jesus comes to the disciples on the first Easter evening and quietly gives the Spirit to the disciples. Matthew’s Gospel even depicts Jesus’ second coming to the disciples on a mountaintop. He gives them the Great Commission.

There are many ways of looking at the same truth. Jesus’ departure from this life through death, then after his resurrection through what the Bible calls the ascension--going back to heaven--his departure was not permanent. In the final words of Revelation, the risen Christ states again and again, “I am coming.” His message of hope was for believers who were struggling through persecution, those to whom the book of Revelation was written in the first place. The words of comfort and hope given them in the first place were brought powerfully to a conclusion placed on the lips of the risen Christ:

I am coming soon. “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. It is I, Jesus. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star. (Rev. 22: 12, 13, 16)

The author of Revelation sought to comfort believers, the faithful. “Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates.” (Rev. 22: 14). The martyrs were those who had *washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb*. This message was to give hope to those were suffering and encouragement for them to persevere. And we hear the response of those to whom the message was given, “Come! Let everyone who hears say, Come. Let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! (Rev. 22: 17, 20-21)

The curtain of the New Testament rings down much as it did on the Old Testament, acknowledging the brokenness of this world and much there is to be done—how much work lies ahead of us. But God is not finished. God is still working, still speaking, still present in us and with us, still seeking those who will say, “Come, Holy Spirit.”

The early Christian church were troublemakers, at least to the local religious leaders. According to the New Testament, “they turned the world upside down.” (Acts 17:6) The world for those first Christians had been turned upside down by Jesus. They were trying to cope with a new reality, a new *right side up!*

We're invited to be on a journey, to cope with and struggle with that same paradigm shift. Singer and songwriter Ken Medema offered his perspective on it in the song *Flying Upside Down*. It invites us to embrace that new perspective, really a very old perspective, of God's way spoken of by Jesus in the gospels and embraced by the early Christian church. The song's chorus:

Turn it over, turn it 'round  
Raise the humble, free the bound  
Down is up and up is down  
This world looks different to you  
When you're flying upside down.

We're invited to embrace not a top down religion, but an inside out faith that begins with us being transformed inwardly and then living to make a difference in the world. Many of you are familiar with my story. I grew up the child of a military family. There was a lot of moving and, consequently, difficulty establishing close friendships. The situation came to feel like normal. Without consciously choosing, I bought into a way of being in which I hesitated to challenge the status quo. I worked hard, followed the rules and somehow expected to get rewarded for it. It was as though I expected life to be like school. There would always be someone to tell me the right answers and give me a gold star for being smart enough, good enough, and for not rocking the boat.

if I followed the rules, religious rules as well as life rules, I'd get rewarded and be safe and happy. I think many people live with that expectation and hope to hear someday, "You've done it! You've met the standards. You've passed the class. You're good enough. You're approved. Now here's your reward." But life is not like that. Rarely is there someone waiting to reward you for being good and behaving well. The life of faith is a pathway of questioning and discovery that is its own reward! Our lives find meaning in partnership with God and by how we live and what we do. This happens far less by finding a correct path and much more by blazing our own paths.

There was a major paradigm shift with Jesus. In the Gospels, he challenged us to think of God differently and to view our faith in God from a new perspective--God as loving, intimate, and & close; God as truth itself in which we live. We're invited to see ourselves each reflecting the incarnation, the divine presence, and our lives as expressing something of the nature of who God is and what God wants.

Jesus is God's invitation to participate with God, through the Spirit, in shaping this world in the image of God's dream of peace, wholeness, justice, and love. We're encouraged to be faithful on life's journey: to hang in and keep going. We're invited to grow spiritually so that the way of thinking, the mind that Jesus had, becomes our way of thinking and acting, and so what we want begins to change so that what we value most is love, peace, patience, kindness, and faith. The invitation Jesus brought from God was to grow in faith and to change how we see the world and ourselves in it.

The early church, those who first received the book of Revelation in the midst of great fear and great suffering, were invited to see themselves very differently--not as victims of an irresistible evil, but as the victorious people of a God who transforms evil into good through an overwhelming and sacrificial love expressed in Jesus. And for us, the work of transforming brokenness into wholeness, darkness into light, and sorrow into joy is a work God shares with us. The part of that work that's yours to do well corresponds to what you want, what you value, and what you enjoy at the deepest level. In this way, what you want can hold the key to what

God wants to do in this world in partnership with you both to re-shape the world according to what you see and to see the world with the eyes of God.

Now the onus and the invitation belong to us to be the change we want to see. There really are no rules--just the presence of the one from whom all blessings flow! Last night, a small group of people from Crossroads church met with a small group from a local synagogue, to get to know each other and talk about our faith traditions. We had a wonderful time with lots of fun and were reminded that we can always choose how to live out our faith. We can be inclusive or exclusive, open and soft of heart or narrow and hard of heart. I highly recommend being open, inclusive, and welcoming.

Earlier yesterday and also Friday evening, at Crossroads' annual direction setting retreat, we had a really wonderful and inspiring time. Many who were there had an opportunity to make some choices about what they wanted to do this coming year. As a group, we were able to gain a clearer sense of what we want Crossroads Church to be and do. I want to extend that invitation for you to choose to act on your values and passions in Jesus' name. Your life will become a doxology, a song of praise each day.