

Sermon for April 24, 2016 – 5th Sunday after Easter

Revelation 21:1-6 (NIV84)

Theme: Behold! He is making everything new.

- 1) He is creating a new heaven and earth for us to enjoy.
- 2) He is establishing a new relationship with us in love.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." ⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life."

Having a dream career, family and home . . . many people live as if attaining these things is the most important thing in life. "You only live once, so make the most of it." Well, is that true? Should our focus in life be trying to get all we can out of life?

The Bible answers that question by saying: *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. . . The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.*¹

Careers always come to an end. Houses need constant repair. Families grow old and separate. All these things illustrate the truth: *The world and its desires pass away.*

So what is the most important thing in life? Our relationship with God through faith in Christ Jesus. Why? Because, even though this world and everything in it will pass away, our relationship with God will endure forever. Let us consider these things under the theme: **Behold! He is making everything new.** 1) *He is creating a new heaven and earth for us to enjoy.* 2) *He is establishing a new relationship with us in love.*

Part One: He is creating a new heaven and earth for us to enjoy.

Our sermon text is part of a glorious vision the apostle John saw while he was exiled on the Island of Patmos. The Church was suffering severe persecution at that time. Christians were losing their property, freedom and lives. They lived in worry and fear. They were tempted to wonder whether or not God loved them.

In order to comfort and encourage these persecuted Christians, God gave John a grand vision of the past, present and future – showing how Christ is in control of it all. Even though his followers suffered much on this earth, Jesus would keep his promise to come again to deliver them. And after judging the world, he would do something wonderful.

The apostle John writes: *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.*

Our current earth will not last forever. No, ever since the fall into sin, our world has been cursed into a constant state of decay and corruption. And because of this curse, our earth will be destroyed on the Last Day.

But out of its ashes, God promises to create a new earth and new heaven. What will the new earth be like? It will be perfect in every way – just like our current world was before the fall into sin. All the scary things that terrify people like earthquakes, tornadoes, storms and tsunamis . . . will be absent. Everything will be perfect, beautiful and good. It will endure forever.

This new heaven and earth is the home Jesus spoke about, when he said: *In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*ⁱⁱⁱⁱ God wants us Christians to focus on our future home as we live our lives on this earth. Why? Because Jesus suffered and died on the cross for our sins in order to purchase us for this home. God wants us to live with him forever. He knows that if we don't keep our hearts and minds focused on this future home, the devil will lead us astray with all sorts of worries, doubts and temptations.

Yes, Jesus is coming again soon, and when He comes, he will bring our new perfect home with him. What a comfort this is for us Christians who see this world becoming more and more corrupt and polluted with sin. Behold, Jesus is making everything new. He is creating a new heaven and earth for us enjoy. He is establishing a new relationship with us in love.

Part Two: *He is establishing a new relationship with us in love.*

The only reason we will be allowed to enjoy this new heaven and new earth is because of the relationship we share with God in Christ.

And what kind of relationship is that? One of supreme love and mercy. Even though we were born with a corrupt, sinful nature that constantly rebelled against God, the LORD pitied us to such a degree that He sent Jesus, his one and only Son, to suffer and die for our sins. Through holy Baptism he has adopted us to be his own children – having worked faith in our hearts through the Gospel. We belong to him and he belongs to us.

Sadly, our relationship with God will never be perfect this side of heaven: our love for Him will always be tainted with sin. This is why we look forward to the other new thing Christ will do when he returns: he will establish a new relationship with us in love.

The apostle John writes: *I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.*

In the Bible, Jerusalem is often symbolic for the Church. What is the Church? It is the total sum of all believers in heaven and on earth. The Church is symbolized as Jerusalem because, just as God made his presence known in the Jerusalem of Old Testament times, so also God makes his presence known in the Church.

John saw the Church – the total sum of all believers – coming down from heaven to meet Christ. They were raised from the dead and arrayed in glory - *prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband*. Scripture often calls the Church the bride of Christ. Why? Because of the love a groom has for his bride – especially at his wedding. Jesus loves us with an even greater love. He swore an oath to love us always. As a groom takes a bride to be with him for life, so Jesus will take us to be with him forever.

We noticed that the Church is beautifully dressed for her husband. What is the Church wearing? Nothing less than the righteousness Jesus won for her through his perfect life, innocent death and glorious resurrection; as St. Paul once wrote: *Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Holy and blameless from all sin – this is what we, wretched sinners that we were, are now through faith in Christ Jesus. This truth will be revealed to be true on the Last Day when we will hear a loud voice from God's throne saying: *"Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."*⁴ *He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*⁵ *He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."*⁶ *He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.*

What a beautiful message from God's throne! From now on God will dwell with man. The saints will have a relationship with God greater than Adam and Eve had with him before the fall. Never again will man hide from God as Adam hid from him in the garden of Eden. Never again will mankind be separated from God, going his own evil way. No, they will be his people and he will be their God. Every tear will be wiped away. There will be no pain or anything that causes it. There will be no death. The old cycle of life, death and decay that we are so used to in this present, sin-cursed world, will have passed away. Everything will be different and filled with life.

Our minds cannot even begin to fathom what that will be like. We are so used to the temporality of this earth. We long for eternity, but can't comprehend it. When Christ comes on the Last Day all our longings will be fulfilled, and we won't have to imagine anything, because we will be living it.

What a beautiful, wonderful home our God will give us on the Last Day. What an awesome relationship we will have with Christ! No wonder Saint Paul could write: *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*^{iv} Yes, this teaching of our new eternal home is incredibly important for us to consider now - because in this life we face many troubles and temptations. We are tempted to focus on the things of this earth. We are tempted to be discontent with what the LORD blesses us with in this life. We are tempted to despair in tribulation and stand in fear of all the evil that surrounds us.

Dear Christian, when the devil tempts you like this, remember St. Paul's encouragement: *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*^v

Behold! God is making everything new. He is creating a new heaven and earth for us to enjoy. He is establishing a new relationship with us in love. May these truths ever lead us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus - living to his glory as we await his return. Amen.

ⁱ 1Jo 2:15,17 NIV84

ⁱⁱ Joh 14:2-3 NIV84

ⁱⁱⁱ Eph 5:25-27 NIV84

^{iv} Rom 8:18 NIV84

^v 2Co 4:16-18 NIV84