

Making All Things New – Reflection on Revelation 21:1-6 by Megan Cambridge

If you visit the Greek island of Patmos, which I have been lucky enough to do, you can take the tourist bus or, as we did, you can walk up the steep and winding road to the Monastery of St John the Theologian which overlooks the whole island. As you travel along the road snaking its way up the hill you come to the Cave of the Apocalypse where St John received the vision recorded in Revelation.

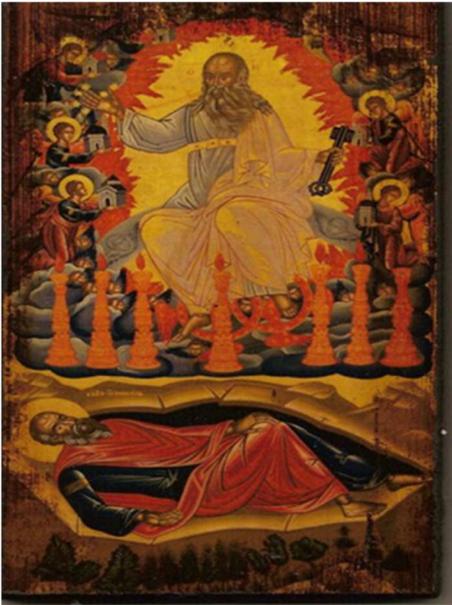


Figure 1 – Icon the Revelation of St John



Figure 2 - The Cave of the Apocalypse



Figure 3 - Interior of the Cave

In amongst the icons and the votive offerings there is a corner of the cave where he is said to have lain down and where he also held himself up. The indentation in the rock wall where he laid his head is surrounded with an ornate silver halo and the hand hold in the wall higher up on the right is also lined with beaten silver. Although busy with a steady stream of visitors now, I am sure it would have been a wonderfully cool and quiet place so long ago.

John was a very old man when he was exiled to the island of Patmos and he had outlived most of the other disciples. He had seen the church under his care flourish and then scatter under the pressure of persecution. Some assume that the gruesome events Revelation describes still lie in our future. However, the church to which John first wrote it, was already experiencing the kind of misery he describes. The early Christians to whom John wrote were dealing with great adversity, including martyrdom.

Since Easter we have been reading from the book of Revelation in which John pulls open the curtain of heaven and gives us a vision of what is happening in the heavenly realm, in a cosmic battle between God and Satan. The turf they are fighting over is your soul, and mine. As we read, we are given a glimpse of that battle. It is a battle that God will ultimately win. John uses the term overcome extensively throughout this letter to the churches. Good will overcome evil. God will overcome Satan. We can overcome the hardships that come with a life of faith. 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.”

What a picture John gives us in today’s reading of this new creation; the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven, “prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.” Theologian Craig Koester writes, “Death is real for those whom God has created. Yet in Christ, there is also the promise of resurrection—and resurrection is a new act of creation. Resurrection is the promise of a new existence, a transformed existence’.

On this Fifth Sunday of Easter, we continue to celebrate the mystery of Jesus’ resurrection.

Resurrection promises that we will be the same, but totally different: everything **will be made new, not** replaced by new and different things.

God is present with us, and plans to be with us throughout all eternity. Our whole existence is framed by the presence of God and God will wipe away every tear. Not only the tears we shed now, but every tear ever shed, for every pain ever felt will be erased. Not only the tears we weep, but the tears we cause, will be gone.

At various points in history there have been those Christians who have said, "This is it. The world is going to end very soon". During the twentieth century repeated acts of genocide seemed to be pointing towards the end of time and then twenty-two years ago, some assumed, the new millennium's start would signal Jesus' return. Church historian Martin Marty, however, notes that the world is, in one sense, always coming to an end. The world of the first century was figuratively, if not literally, ending even as John wrote our text. John's message in today's reading is that this world is not the end. Jesus' death and resurrection signal that the brokenness, heartache and disappointment that we sometimes experience in this world do not get the last word.

While people sometimes assume that John is only talking about something that's far away in both time and space, that is not a completely biblical assumption. After all, Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection change nearly everything right now. Isn't God's dwelling already in and among God's people to comfort, strengthen and encourage us? God insists, "I **am** making all things new." (not I **will** make all things new in the future). The Holy Spirit is already comforting people. Jesus' death and resurrection already changed the meaning of "death". Christians' death is now simply a doorway into God's glorious presence.

John's vision of the new creation, however, changes not only the way we die, but also the way you and I live. Albert Barnes (theologian) says, "Heaven exists not just as a future place to go after we die, but also as an inspiration for the life you have today." Knowing that Christ waits for us with open arms ought to make all the difference in how we live today.

Many people who have made a difference in this world believed most strongly in John's vision of the world to come. The apostles, for instance, sought the humane treatment of slaves, women and children. More recently devout Christians like William Wilberforce worked to abolish slavery. A twentieth-century African American pastor gave us a vision of a colour-blind society. They got part of their vision for this world in John's description of the new world Christ will bring at his return.

"I saw a new heaven and a new earth," St. John says. "I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." I heard "the one who was seated on the throne [say], 'See, I am making all things new.'"

It our gospel reading we know that things are going to change – the disciples' world is going to be made new. Their world is definitely changing. Jesus gives them his departing instructions; "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Love reveals the new heaven and new earth. Love is the gateway, the entry, into the new Jerusalem. **Love makes all things new.** Love is both the means and the goal, a journey that has no ending and a destination that has no fixed point.

This is a quote I came across when reading and reflecting for today's Reflection and seems to sum things up well.... 'It's all pretty simple when you get right down to it. It's about people, life, and circumstances. It is about seeing that "the home of God is among mortals." It looks like people running towards the explosion to help the injured. It's eyes looking for movement in the rubble, ears listening for a whimper, and bare hands digging for life. It's a bedside vigil when all you can do is hold a hand. It's standing next to another and listening to his or her diagnosis. It's cooking and delivering a meal to one whose appetite has been stolen by sorrow. It's the courage to sit with the pain and loss of another knowing you have no idea of what to say or do. It's the giving of one's money to care for another whom we have never and will never meet. It's a silent night of tears and prayer.'

(Michael K. Marsh Interrupting The Silence)

These and a thousand other acts like them are the acts of love that have been done for us and, by God's grace, we do for another. It seems to me, when these things are happening, a new heaven a new earth are here and we experience **all things being made new.**