

St John United Church of Christ
Rev. Clarence Bangs, Guest Minister
May 20, 2007

Revelation 22:12-21

A Reassuring Word of Hope

(Preliminary words before reading scripture.)

From the 2nd Sunday of Easter to today, the 7th Sunday of Easter the epistle lectionary readings are from the book of Revelation. Mentioning the book of Revelation stirs up some preconceived ideas such as wild predictions of the end of the world. It is probably the most misused and misunderstood book in the Bible. Also, some people do not like the style of the book. Because the message is revealed in several visions with highly unusually symbolic characters, one needs a good imagination. Revelation is best understood as a drama. Some people are more comfortable with another style of writing.

We will not be going in the direction of wild speculations concerning the end of the world this morning. Instead, we will be considering the book of Revelation as a reassuring word of hope from Jesus to a person named John for the church at the later part of the first century.

To begin to understand the message of the book of Revelation we have to understand it in the historical context when it was written and read by Christians who were a minority of the population living in the Western part of modern Turkey, which was part of the Roman Empire. Their society was not Christian. Roman religions worshipped idols and the emperor. If people did not include this worship in their lives they were harassed and even put to death for not being good citizens. This was the tension, remain true to Jesus or compromise and accept the standards of their society that included worshipping idols and the emperor. It was not popular to be a Christian. It was a struggle and it was dangerous.

Today's scripture, Revelation 22:12-21, are the final words of the story of God's victory over evil powers through Jesus. Let us hear them now with the understanding of when they were written and heard. (*Read Scripture*)

The saints cry out in Rev. 6:10 "how long" will it be until God steps in and judges evil. We are told at the beginning of Revelation (1:3) "the time is near" and at the end "I am coming soon". That is good news during difficult times. The difficulties will not last forever. They will end. There will be a new day. The natural response is "Come Lord Jesus!" We want it to happen now.

John, the writer, is given several visions by God to transmit to a suffering church what is going to take place. The visions reveal what is going to happen to those who

St John United Church of Christ
Rev. Clarence Bangs, Guest Minister
May 20, 2007

are faithful to God and those who oppose God. This morning we will focus on the word of hope for those who are faithful to God. We will leave the warnings to those who oppose God to another time.

Rev. 7:9-10 gives a picture of those who died for their faith praising God. *“After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb’”*. The picture continues in verses 15-17, *“For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”* Those who died for their faith did not die in vain. They are praising God in the heavenly realm.

A reassuring word of hope is given in the vision of a new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21:1-4, *“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. And I saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming out of the heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying. ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples and God himself will be with them; 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.’”*

Revelation 21 concludes with the vision of the New Jerusalem and its beauty. In the New Jerusalem will be those whose name is written in the Lamb’s book of life.

Revelation 22:1-6 contains the last vision of hope. In it we see the river of the water of life that flows from the throne of God. On either side of it is the tree of life. We have a picture of the Garden of Eden restored. Things are like what God had intended for them to be.

It is best focus on the visions that give us the reassuring word of hope. This is the message to the church. We will face struggles as individuals and the church in

St John United Church of Christ
Rev. Clarence Bangs, Guest Minister
May 20, 2007

general. Our faith will be tested in an unfriendly world, but only for a season. Evil powers will be conquered and all things will be made new.

No matter how things may look, we have confidence that God will ultimately conquer all evil powers and save the church. It is not for us to speculate when or how. It is for us to remain faithful to God at all times.

We believe what the song that was sung this morning said, *“God will make a way where there seems to be no way, God works in ways we can not see, God will make a way for me; God will be my guide, hold me closely to God’s side, with love and strength for each new day, God will make a way.”*

Jesus has given his reassuring word of hope to the church, “I am coming soon.” May we ever cherish it and lovingly respond to it with joyful anticipation and confident readiness, with the urgent appeal “Come, Lord Jesus.”