

Sermon for Easter II Year C 2025

Have you ever been mystified, confused, creeped out or just plain scared of the book of Revelation?

You're certainly not alone.

And so I think we may be entitled to compensation in the form of a structured sermon series that is not looking to control you with fear but give you hope in a hopeless time—just as the original author intended.

So here we go!

First you need to know that Revelation was a letter.

Just like most of the New Testament writings, it is a letter from a particular person to a particular person or persons.

In this case, Revelation is a letter from a church leader named John—no not *that* John, the evangelist—this John was known as John of Patmos.

He wrote to seven particular churches in the Roman province of Asia which is now the western coastal region of Turkey.

John knew these churches personally.

They all knew him.

He wasn't with each of them every week, but he probably visited them regularly—sort of like a bishop would except that in the late first century when he wrote this letter, bishops weren't yet a thing.

This letter was meant to be read out loud, in one go, in worship like a radio drama so the imagery and imagination would take off together leaving the listener with a hope more profound than if John had just sent them a greeting card with words “be hopeful” written inside.

That is all Revelation is.

A letter from John to those particular people in those particular churches. Not one bit of it was written with a secret divine “woo-woo” pen that gave it hidden meaning to be found and revealed thousands of years later.

It was not written to us, . . . this was someone else's mail.

With that said, sometimes it can be both interesting and educational to read someone else's mail.

To me, reading Revelation is like
reading an old letter you found in a trunk in the attic
that your great-grandpa wrote to his sweetheart during the war.
If you can resist the temptation to believe that great-grandpa
was not actually writing to the person
who would become your great-grandma but to you,
his as yet unborn descendant generations away in secret code,
if you can resist that temptation,
then you might be able to read it and learn something
about the way they faced adversity and fear.
What they did to persevere.
How they held onto love even in the midst of horror.

That can also be true of the letter we call Revelation.
When we read it we can also learn of a time
that was plenty dramatic enough
without any of the made up, idiotic nonsense
people have piled on it over the years.
The original apostles were gone,
but the institutional church had not yet grown into being.
Back in Israel/Palestine, Jewish revolutionaries had mixed it up once
again with the Roman occupiers resulting in the destruction of the
Temple and adding to a critically volatile political and religious
instability that fully engulfed the empire—including these seven
churches that Paul and his followers had planted.
It was in that atmosphere of incredible anxiety, volatility, uncertainty,
and terrible persecution that these churches were trying to figure out
how to be faithful while the world around them was, well,
an absolute dumpster fire.

And what a dumpster fire it was!

War was being waged from Europe to Asia.
Vesuvius erupted in 79 burying Pompeii
and covering the region with panic causing darkness.
There was widespread famine.
Christians had become easy scapegoats
for everything bad that was happening
because they were a minority fringe sect
that appealed to the lower classes.
They were regarded as unpatriotic atheists—they did not subscribe to the
pantheon of Roman gods and . . .
they met in secret eating flesh and drinking blood!
The fire that burned much of Rome in Nero's reign
was easily blamed on them
and even after Nero died, the tyranny didn't go away.
At the same time, Judaism was pushing out
those who confessed Jesus as the Messiah.

The people of these seven churches did not feel part of the Roman world
nor did they feel a part of the Jewish world.
They didn't know who they were or where they fit,
or if they fit anywhere at all
and they had no idea how their dumpster fire of a world
would crash in on them next.

It is to that particular people, in that particular time,
a people weary and worn, who staggered into church carrying all the
weight of their dumpster fire world with them
that John begins his letter with the proclamation of hope we heard
in today's lesson:

Look! He is coming!

The Lord God who is the beginning and the end

The One who is and who was and who is to come,

the Almighty . . . he is coming.

God sees. God cares. God is coming!

Hang in there people—John is saying.

That was the pastoral message they needed to hear!
No secret extra hidden message required.
It was life giving just as it was written.

Now, when we read their mail 2000 years later,
we not only get to hear the same promise that God sees, God cares,
and God is coming, but we know it was a message that worked.
The people hung in there!
The storm of empire ran out of rain,
as all storms do.
And that is something worth taking home
from these other peoples' mail.
God sees. God cares. God is coming.
This is a promise.

Listen for these proclamations throughout the book of Revelation
and don't get caught up by the symbolism and allegory—
that was just John's way of smuggling notes past the Roman readers
who would not understand.
Those elements of the letter have more in common with a political
cartoon or satire.
So if we are deaf to the message that God sees, God cares,
and God is coming . . . then the joke is lost on us.

The message that God sees, God cares, and God is coming is
in many ways what the risen Christ says to the disciples in John:
Peace be with you.
He shows them his wounded hands and side and says again,
Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.
In the power of the Holy Spirit, the risen Christ says, I was sent
and so I now send you.

Jesus, the anointed one, the one who announced good news to the poor,
proclaimed release to the captives,
liberation for the oppressed and God's jubilee,
and was himself crushed by empire—he is the faithful one,
the ruler of all the kings of the earth,
he is the one who calls his people out of empire in Revelation.
Ultimately the book of Revelation is about a clash of powers.
God versus empire.
And Jesus, the lamb who was slain, is the one who is victorious.

It's no idle tale.
It's true that grace and forgiveness and the redemption of all things are
abundant in Christ.
Alleluia! Christ is risen.
Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!