

Sermon for Easter V Year C 2025
Love and a New Heaven and a New Earth

*I saw a new heaven and a new earth, John of Patmos writes.
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.”*

I love these words and this promise we hear only from the book of Revelation—the only book of the New Testament that almost didn’t make it into the Christian portion of the bible.

It seems there were many two thousand years ago who, like many of us, find this book not just scary and obscure but also just plain weird.

Now I know I told you several weeks ago now that this was a letter from a Christian prophet, a seer named John, to seven churches who were undergoing not only the persecution of the most powerful earthly empire in the world at the time but also violence of constant wars, the complete destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, widespread famine and the eruption of a volcano called Vesuvius—which caused the death and destruction of an entire city but also created darkness for thousands of miles for many months.

Imagine living through such times and hearing these words—

I saw a new heaven and a new earth . . .

And the one who was seated on the throne said,

“See, I am making all things new.”

We, too, are experiencing unwanted and to some extent unanticipated upheavals and disasters in our world—politically, socially, religiously, and ecologically.

As if that weren’t enough, we have personal upheavals and disasters to deal with as well as the local and national and global ones.

Many if not all of us feel as if the ground under our feet is shaking and unstable, the structures of our life are collapsing or at best unstable, our world is imploding.

With all that I have seen and heard I sometimes don't want to hear or read the words of Revelation—that infamous letter of John of Patmos. And yet . . . I want to see what he saw. I want to hear what he heard. I suspect I'm not alone in that. People all around the world want to see and hear. You and I want to see and hear. The darkness of the circumstances we find ourselves in, however, make it difficult to see and hear that all things are being made new.

How fitting it is then that today's gospel takes us back to another dark night—a last supper, a betrayal, a departure, an impending death. It is the night before Jesus' crucifixion. He has fed his disciples. He's washed their feet. Judas has stepped out into the night of betrayal. Jesus tells his disciples that he is leaving and that they cannot go with him. Peter and Thomas will ask what everyone is thinking. "Why not?" "Where are you going?" "How will we find our way?" No doubt, they feel the structures of their lives crumbling and the ground shaking. Their world is in upheaval, it is changing.

The disciples will have to learn, see, and trust that even in the midst of terror and tragedy, chaos and pain, betrayal and false accusations, death and sorrow—all things are being made new. So must we. We, too, must learn that God's "making new" happens in the midst of, not apart from, the circumstances of our lives and world. Even as that is the disciples' work, so, too, it is our work.

And, of course, it is not easy work.
It is some of the most difficult work we ever do . . .
as difficult as letting someone else wash your feet
or washing someone else's feet.
Ultimately, it is the work of self-giving love.

*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.*

This is Jesus' departing instructions—no, commandment.
As in, it's not a suggestion.
Please take note, Jesus did not say,
“It would be really nice and it would make me happy if you would,
you know, love one another—or at least not be mean to one another.”
Tragically, this is the most ignored by Christians
of all God's commandments.
Make no mistake—Jesus told his *disciples*—those who have learned
from him, follow him, and call themselves Christians are the ones who
are most likely to think that as long as we're “nice” we have kept this
commandment.
Now I'm not saying that we shouldn't be “nice” to each other—
the Lord knows we don't have enough politeness and civility
these days to fill a teacup but . . .
the love Jesus is talking about isn't the same thing as “nice.”

It's not something to be accomplished—
as if we had completed some kind of Christian finishing school course.
No, to love as Jesus loved is a way of living and being,
an orientation and disposition such that we humbly choose
kindness over niceties,
justice over legalities,
peace and reconciliation over just going along to get along.

None of this is easy. All of this is messy and difficult and will require us to have a very close walk with our Lord day by day.

There is something about this love for one another—the love of Christ we receive and then share with one another—that is revelatory—it makes Christ present in whatever circumstance we might find ourselves. Jesus' command for us to love one another is both our preparation for and our participation in his resurrected life here and now.

This Christ-like love reveals the new heaven and new earth.
Love is the gateway, the entry, into the new Jerusalem, the City of God.
Love makes all things new.
Love is both the means and the goal.
It is a journey that has no ending
and a destination that has no fixed point.

The Christ-like love Jesus gives us and commands us to share is independent of who the other is or our feelings about him or her. It is not determined by our assessment of his or her qualities or lovability or likeability.
It takes us beyond sentimentality, emotions, and family relationships.
It is less about a feeling. It is a choice.
If we are Jesus' disciples, we show it by choosing to share his love with one another.
The mark of Christ's disciples is not what they believe, but how they love.

Love is the commitment to another that is embodied and dedicated to acting in concrete ways that promotes the best for the other in every possible way.

This love wills the best for the other in body, mind, or spirit.
And so we make our reverent best choices on how the other can thrive and know the love of Christ through how we speak and act.
We do not believe or reason our way into loving one another.

We receive the love of Christ and then we share it with others—actively, on purpose, with humility, kindness, justice and peace.

That's what Jesus did.

His life, death and resurrection are nothing less than the embodiment and enactment of love.

You and I, his disciples, continue that by sharing the love we have received from him with one another.

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 toward an explosion to help the injured.

It's eyes seeking and ears listening for even the softest cry for help.

It's a bedside vigil when all you can do is hold a hand.

It's standing next to another and listening to their sorrows and challenges.

It's making sure that the most vulnerable in our communities are safe, given shelter and clothing, food and water.

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 giving one's money to care for another whom we may never know and will never meet.

It is never returning evil for evil,

doing good even to those who misuse and persecute us.

It is a silent night of tears and prayer.

These and a thousand other acts like them are the acts of Christ-like love that have been done for us and, by God's grace, we do for one another.

When I see these things happening, I see a new heaven and a new earth and I know myself to be living in the New Jerusalem.

When I hear stories about these acts of love, I experience all things being made new.

The vision in this portion of John's "revelation" letter is a reality as close as the person next to you and as broad as the stranger on the other side of the world.

I give you a new commandment.

Love one another as I have loved you.

Behold, I am making all things new.