

Waiting For A New And Better World

Revelation 21:1-5

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

April 28, 2013 – Fifth Sunday of Easter



In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. As a Christian, one thing which ought to be central to your faith life is that you don't cling to this world and its allure, but rather, direct your eyes heavenward, seeking only the face of Christ and the things of the kingdom of God – which is all well and good in theory. The reality, however, is that because of the weakness of our sinful flesh that's a hard trick to pull off all the time – maybe ever. In fact, I'd say most of us are like the little child who would rather have half a candy bar today than rely on the promise that tomorrow he might have two. In fact, most times you and I would much prefer to have just about anything today rather than having to wait until tomorrow for something that may or may not happen. But in things spiritual this is a very dangerous attitude.

The reason this is so dangerous is because our world is very much like that half a candy bar. It doesn't matter how good it is, how big it is, or how enticingly it's wrapped and packaged, eventually both the candy bar and our world are going to pass away – a fact which is well documented in God's Word. Throughout the book of the Revelation, St. John spends an inordinate amount of energy describing in graphic, horrific detail the sinful rebellion of this world, its rulers, and people – great and small alike. He describes with great clarity the plagues which God warns us are going to come upon this world in His wrath and judgment over sin – and finally the ultimate destruction of the world on Judgment Day when all things will abruptly come to an end – including, of course, not only this world, but everything in and on it.

I remember hearing a story once about a young man in science class who was told by his professor that the Sun would probably burn up in about 12 billion years, and that when it happened all life on Earth would cease to exist. In aston-

ishment the young man blurted out, "How long did you say it would be before the end of the world?" The professor responded, "About 12 billion years." To which the student issued an audible sigh of relief, saying: "Whew, I thought you said "12 million years!" While the story is, of course, rather farfetched, it does illustrate an attitude most people hold today – namely, that we're all going to live long enough so that there will always be at least one more opportunity to cement our relationship with God and make everything right. To those who think thusly I would direct them to the words of the 39th Psalm, which reads: "Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am. Indeed, You have made my days as a handbreadth, and my age is as nothing before You. Certainly every man at his best state is but vapor."

What these words tell us is that you ought not toil for the things of this world as if they had some eternal significance. For everything we have in this life – absolutely everything – will one day pass into nothingness. You won't be able to take any of it with you into the next life. No matter how important your house, your car, your job, your boat, your money, your Play Station, your Xbox, or anything else you hold dear and might seem, there is a time coming when all this – as important as it is to you now – will be worthless. There is an exception, of course, and that's if these things have been, and are, the main focus of your life – your "god," if you will. In that case you'll find, much to your dismay and fright, that those things you cherished and worshiped will drag you down into the pits of hell.

Do you remember how, when God finally decided He'd had enough from the inhabitants of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, that He destroyed them with fire and brimstone – all except Abraham's nephew Lot and His family who were

taken out of the city by angels? As they were leaving, the angels instructed them not to look back even for an instant, for God was about to destroy everything from their former life. Lot's wife, however, wasn't able to resist the temptation to look back because of her attachment to her life there. Consequently she fell under God's judgment and was turned into a pillar of salt as a testimony to us all.

But, as a child of God, you have no reason to be enthralled with your life and this world which is passing away. While it may be true that this can often be a very pleasant place to live and offers many pleasures, this world offers nothing to compare with the riches God has prepared for those who love Him. And that's the beauty of this morning's text, for here God reveals what you can look forward to as you enter into the New Jerusalem. Hollywood, of course, has its own version of heaven where everyone walks around in white choir robes and carries a harp while wispy clouds roll around their feet and people appear and disappear into the fog that surrounds them on every side. The "New Heaven and the New Earth" of Scripture, however, is where the people of God dwell for all eternity in a world perhaps even more solid than our own.

But most important is the status of those who dwell there. In this life you have to deal with all manner of sin, sickness, pain, suffering and death. However, in the New Jerusalem, those things won't even be so much as a brief memory. In the home of God's elect there will be *no* sin, *no* pain, *no* suffering, *no* sorrow, and *no* death. The "New Heaven and the New Earth" "will be permanent and lasting, where we, as the children of God, will enjoy the closest possible communion with our Lord, where we will live with Him in purity, holiness, sinlessness and righteousness forever and ever. For you see, dear Christian, this earth is not your final resting place. Heaven is your home.

And so that you might be all the more certain of this, God Himself declares here in the words of St. John that this revelation is trustworthy and his words are true. The things our Lord caused

John to see were not simply God's good hopes or intentions for mankind as if they might or might not actually ever come to pass. God sees your future just as clearly as I'm able to see you sitting here this morning – actually much more clearly than that, since God doesn't need glasses! Because God can be trusted to keep His Word, you can be sure that these things here seen by John are as if they had already happened, for in the eternal scheme of things and in God's blessed economy they already have!

Right now God is preparing His New Creation, and even at the present time, through the merits of Christ imputed to you through Word and Sacrament, God is recreating and re-fashioning you to live forever in this world which is still to come. This process of recreation which takes place whenever and wherever God's Word is proclaimed and His forgiveness is freely extended, unites you with Christ in His death and resurrection – first spiritually, then physically, as Paul teaches in Romans 6:4-5. This process is painful in that it requires repentance, death and mourning, but to you who endure to the end – to you who by cling to the promises of Christ – you have the assurance of God that you will receive a glorious, eternal inheritance.

You know it already in your heart of hearts, don't you – that is, that this world and its glory are passing away – and quickly. Well, I say, "Bring it on!" In Holy Baptism you've already died to this world. You've already been raised from the dead to live with Christ. You've already fixed your hope upon His promises. And through the power of the Holy Spirit living in you, you will continue to press forward toward that new and better world where one day – and for all the days yet to come – you will see God face to face as He really is, and in the glory of His heaven dwell with Him forever and ever. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.