

Waiting For A New And Better World

Revelation 21:1-5

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

May 19, 2019 – 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 is absolutely central to our faith life is that we steadfastly refuse to cling to this world and its allure, but rather, direct our eyes heavenward, seeking only the face of Christ and the things of the kingdom of God. Now, that's all well and good in theory, isn't it? The reality, however, is that because of the weakness of our sinful flesh this is a very difficult trick to pull off all the time – if ever. In fact, I'd be inclined to say most of us are like the little child who would rather have half a candy bar today than to rely on the fleeting promise that tomorrow he might be able to have two candy bars. Truth be known, most of the time you and I would much rather prefer to have just about anything today rather than having to wait until tomorrow for something that may or may not ever happen. But may I say that concerning things spiritual, eternal and heavenly, this is a very dangerous attitude to maintain.

The reason this attitude is so dangerous is because our world is very much like that half a candy bar. It doesn't matter so much how good it is, how big it is, or how enticingly it happens to be wrapped and packaged, at some time in the future both that 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, for instance, St. John spends an inordinate amount of time and energy describing in graphic, horrific detail the sinful rebellion of this world, its rulers, and its 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 he writes about the ultimate destruction of this world on Judgment Day when all things will abruptly come to a terrible end – including, of course, not only this world, but everything in and on it.

I remember hearing a humorous story about a young man in science class who was told by his professor in class one day that the Sun would prob-

ably burn itself out in about 12 billion years – and that when this happened all life on Earth would cease to exist. In astonishment the young man blurted out, "How long did you say it would be before the end of the world comes?" The professor responded, "About 12 billion years." To which the student issued an audible sigh of relief and said, much to everyone's amusement: "Whew, I thought you said "12 million years!" While the story is, of course, rather farfetched, it clearly illustrates the attitude many people of our day hold – 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 teach us is that we ought not toil for the things of this world as if they had some eternal significance. For everything we have in this relatively short life – absolutely everything – will one day pass away 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 newest model of cell phone, your Xbox, or anything else you hold near and dear might seem, a time is coming when of all this – as important as it is to you now – will be totally worthless. There is an exception, of course, and that's if these things have been, or 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 to the pits of hell when Judgment Day finally comes.

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

nephew, Lot, and His family who were led out of the city by angels? As they were departing the city, 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 attachments to life there. Consequently she fell under God's judgment and was turned into a pillar of salt as a testimony to us all.

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 world can often be very pleasant in which to live, the truth is that this world offers absolutely nothing to compare with the riches God has prepared for those who love Him. That, I maintain, is the real beauty of this morning's text, for here God reveals what we ought to look forward to as we enter into the New Jerusalem. Hollywood, of course, has its own version of heaven where everyone walks around in white choir robes carrying 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 that glorious place 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 we 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, are going to enjoy the closest possible communion with our God and 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 that his words are true. The things our Lord caused John to

see and write were not simply God's good hopes or intentions for mankind as if they might or might not actually ever come to pass. For God sees your future just as clearly as I'm able to see you sitting here this morning – actually even more clearly than that, since God doesn't need glasses! Because God can be trusted to keep His Word, you can be certain 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 have already happened!

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 re-creation 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 from God that you *will* receive this 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!" Because in Holy Baptism you have already died to this world. You have already been raised from the dead to live with Christ. You have 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.