

## God Dwells among Us

Scripture: Revelation 21:1-6 All Saints Sunday B

November 1, 2009

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### **Scripture: Revelation 21:1-6**

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

<sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them;

<sup>4</sup> 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."

<sup>5</sup> And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."

<sup>6</sup> Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

### **Proclamation of the Word**

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Today we celebrate a God who is trustworthy and true. We celebrate a God who throughout time enters into our lives and makes all things new.

This is *Kirkin of the Tartan* Sunday and *All Saints* Sunday. Today we celebrate that we are part of a great heritage. That heritage goes well before our ancestors of the faith in 16<sup>th</sup> Century Scotland.

Our heritage celebrates that God is on the throne. God is sovereign and just. Our heritage celebrates that God is always at work through history making all things new.

Our heritage celebrates that those who have died in the faith will be raised into new life.

Our heritage celebrates that children are baptized into the faith upon the promises of families and the church to raise that child until he or she professes Christ.

Our heritage celebrates that in life and in death we belong to God.

As I said, these visionary words remind us about death, but more importantly they remind us of our present and our future. At our last Session meeting, I asked the elders to think of the saints of this church and the saints who have shaped their lives. Now remember, saints in our tradition are not the canonized after death kind of saints of exemplary faith. Reformed Presbyterian Christians believe in the priesthood of all believers meaning that people of faith are the

saints. Sainthood says more about God than about us. God works through us and God's gift of salvation makes followers of Jesus a saint- not our own goodness. We believe in God's goodness, but we do our part to participate in what God intends for us.

When I asked for folks to name and share about the saints, it was fascinating to hear. They remembered a variety of people living saints and saints who have gone onto the church triumphant, as we say. One person told of a saint who had been a long-term caregiver for his spouse, and at the same time he faithfully served God by serving this church- faithfully and quietly. Another person told of a woman who had been instrumental in the community serving God by serving her neighbors in need.

I wonder who you would name as the saints of the faith.

Our Scripture has good news for us today. God is at work in and through you and me. God is at work through you and through me. It is God who makes all things new. I love the words of this passage as written by Eugene Peterson in *The Message*, a paraphrase translation of the Bible. Listen!

### ***Everything New***

*1 I saw Heaven and earth new-created. Gone the first Heaven, gone the first earth, gone the sea.*

*2 I saw Holy Jerusalem, new-created, descending resplendent out of Heaven, as ready for God as a bride for her husband.*

*3-5 I heard a voice thunder from the Throne: "Look! Look! God has moved into the neighborhood, making his home with men and women! They're his people, he's their God. He'll wipe every tear from their eyes. Death is gone for good—tears gone, crying gone, pain gone—all the first order of things gone." The Enthroned continued, "Look! I'm making everything new. Write it all down—each word dependable and accurate."*

*6-8 Then he said, "It's happened. I'm A to Z. I'm the Beginning, I'm the Conclusion. From Water-of-Life Well I give freely to the thirsty. Conquerors inherit all this. I'll be God to them, they'll be sons and daughters to me."*

Do you remember in Genesis when God created the world? God speaks and it happens. God says, "Let there be light" and there is and it is real good. In this passage of the re-creation of making all things new, God speaks or as it says, the voice thunders,

**"Look! Look! God has moved into the neighborhood, making his home with men and women! They're his people, he's their God."**

God says it and so it is. God has moved into the neighborhood, making his home with us. God's kingdom is among us. God has moved into the neighborhood. God walked among us in the person of Jesus the Messiah, and

the Spirit of God makes its home here among us now. We live in a God infused world.

So, where have you seen God in your neighborhood, on campus, at places of work, downtown?

If God uses ordinary Saints to reveal himself to us, where have you seen God?

I heard a story this week of God moving into the neighborhood. While in LA I met with pastors from other congregations, living in some pretty different kinds of neighborhoods than we live in, but the story is the same. Here I was meeting with a 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist's pastor in Hollywood right off the freeway- and boy does LA have a freeway system. I must say Hollywood is not the beautiful place presented on TV. Now we also did tour the Hollywood Presbyterian church. This church was made famous by Lloyd Oglivie, former Chaplain to the US Senate. Touring the Hollywood Presbyterian Church felt like stepping back into time, like visiting a museum. In fact, the church has struggled to not live in its past, but to look forward to what the Spirit of God is doing now all around. In contrast, the 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist church seemed alive. Their church had dwindled in numbers and was half-dead, it is now a growing congregation. Something important is happening there. The people are focused on being in mission to their neighborhood by listening first to their neighbors and hearing how the gospel intersects with their lives. Then they are moved to action.

For instance, May is an architect by trade who had just redesigned LA's downtown library. Through her church which is committed to serving it's neighbors and because a couple of the people who worship there are homeless, May became aware of the need for affordable housing. A 1300 square foot home is over \$400,000. As a Christian, May decided her passion and her calling was to address affordable housing, so she risked it. She asked her boss if she might be reassigned to a project which was working on affordable housing. So May was able to live out her calling at work- connecting her faith and her daily life. Her pastor Ryan described May as a quiet woman who is glad to work behind the scenes.

At church May has been a part of connecting her neighbors together through her church as she gathered people in the community asking what they could do to care for their neighborhood. What came out of that conversation among neighbors was the creation of a wonderful mural that speaks to the community about their values. They are trying to bring beauty into the ugliness of the concrete freeway. May and her mission team at church made connections with a youth community center. They connected with a reformed graffiti artist trying to do something of value and not destruction. They designed a mural with a dove of peace in the center something that all people can recognize. May is a woman living out her faith because she has the support of a team of people and a faith community. The people are asking how God is at work in the neighborhood and where they might fit in. There is life and vitality and the Spirit of God moving

through this church and the neighborhood. God has moved into the neighborhood and made his home among men and women and children. The people inside and outside the church belong to God. And God is doing a new thing through these saints of the faith.

On this homecoming weekend for the Clemson University community, I hope you will think about coming home, and seeing God where you live. And not only having the vision to see God, but to be a part of what God is doing in the neighborhood. May did not do it alone, she had a team of people asking the same questions and listening for God's Spirit.

If the news all around is about fear and despair, the good news to day is that God is renewing the creation and making all things new, even us. I think it will happen when we look for God in the neighborhood revealing to us the one we know and worship in Jesus Christ.

Look at your neighbor to the left and to your right and pray for them this week that they will be a part of God's work in the neighborhood, that he or she might leave from this place to show something about the God we worship and serve so that others may come to know and trust God, too. "For God will wipe away tears and all things will be made new" the scripture says. So many people in our neighborhoods need to hear that word of hope. And as a community of faith who celebrate our heritage today, let us not simply live in the past, but live into that future that God has set before us, building upon the work done by so many saints who have gone before us.

### **Prayer**

Oh God of Ages Past, we celebrate that throughout time and in time you enter again and again to reveal yourself to us. For that , we give you our thanks and praise. Use us in the days ahead to be aware of your presence in our places of work, study, and among our relationships, so that we can be a part of making all things new for the sake of your Kingdom. Amen.