

The Federated Church of Hyannis

Sunday, January 10, 2021

Sermon: "A New Start" Part 1

Scripture: Revelation 21:6

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth", for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." 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 without cost from the spring of the water of life.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to a new year and a new series on a new start. It is our hope and prayer that 2021 will be a year of a new beginnings. Last week I said 2020 was a disastrous year. It all depends on how we look at it. There were many good things that happened in 2020. There were also terrible things that happened in 2020. The truth is 2020 was a year of a hard stop. It was like the brakes were slammed and we all felt the jolt of everything stopping. We had all this momentum and like a roller coaster at the end of the ride we felt the rapid stop. It was a hard stop. I would say we as a society were moving too fast. And within the natural laws of things, we were getting recklessly out of control and someone had to pull the emergency stop switch. We were heading for a crash and thank God the emergency system kicked in. 2020 was not the end, but it was a stark wakeup call for many of us.

The blessing of 2020 is that 2021 gets to be a year of new starts. Just because things came to a stop doesn't mean they can't get going again. And this year is a year of new beginnings and new starts.

PART ONE: Book of Revelation

The book of Revelation is often misunderstood. Many fear it, thinking it is a book about the end of the world. Revelation is a book about new beginnings and a new start. Here in Revelation 21:5, we see God is making everything new again. It is a story of new beginnings and new life. It is a new start for all creation. The old is gone and the Lord is doing a new thing. It is not a story about the end, it is a story about a new beginning.

The third century theologian Macrina, who was grandmother to Basil the Great, tells a story of the resurrected life like this. She describes an oil based painting which begins to fade and the paint chips separate from the canvas. This is because contaminants like dust and exposure to the

elements corrupt the paint on the canvas. Over time this artwork will begin to fade and disappear. The only one who can restore the painting to its original beauty is the one who painted the picture. The artist knows every mixture of pigment and every brush stroke that went into it. So when the old fades away, the artist simply paints a new painting. It becomes original again because it has the original artist repainting the artwork uncorrupted by the things of this world. The image of what originally it was intended to be is made new by the hand of the creator.

This is the story of the book of Revelation and the resurrection. This world is corruptible. And thus it is exposed to sin which leads to decay and ultimately death. But in the new heaven and the new earth, there is no more sin because it has been removed. Thus, new life, the resurrected life, is not corruptible to sin. This is how life eternal is possible in the new heaven and the new earth that John speaks about in the book of Revelation. The old must pass away so there can be a new beginning. We are recreated, resurrected in the image of God. Out of the earth we are made new like Adam and Eve were created from the earth. Revelation is all about the new start, it is not about the end. It is not something to fear, it is something to gain hope from. New life is possible in Christ, who removes the curse of sin.

PART TWO: 2021

2020 was a hard stop but it wasn't the end times. Here we stand in 2021. I announced last week that the theme this year is "A Year of New Beginnings". We cannot change the past. We actually had a hard stop to things in 2020. And even with the vaccine now to help stop the pandemic, life going forward is going to be different than what it was before. The former things have passed away. It is time for a new beginning.

The first series I preached here at the Federated Church when I arrived was "The Rebuilding and Restoration of What Once Was". You may recall that Jerusalem had been abandoned for some time. And Nehemiah who was the King's cupbearer was called by God to survey the city of Jerusalem and rebuild the walls and the city gates for the Israelites to return. The city was rebuilt and the people returned.

When we finished that series on "The Rebuilding and Restoration of What Once Was" I said when the restrictions are lifted and we can return to worship together in-person with the ability to invite everyone without fear of the virus we would hold a celebration. I shared I would blow the shofar and we would have two choirs to host a joyous celebration for the return of all displaced by the pandemic. I think this might be the year for such a celebration. But this celebration must be more than just returning to in-person worship services. Nehemiah re-dedicated the city after the restoration project for the purpose of a new beginning. It was a new chapter in Israel's history with the rededication of Jerusalem.

2021 will be a new year with new beginnings for many. We've been fighting this virus for so long. We now finally have the weapon with the vaccine to win this battle. And after we defeat this virus, we need to focus on the work of rebuilding and starting a new chapter. What will this new start at life and new beginning look like in 2021?

PART THREE: The New Beginning

What would a new beginning look like for us? There are a couple of things we can look forward to in 2021.

1. Make time for family and build relationship with the people you love.

A lot of people have shared with me that their schedules prior to 2020 had little time for family and friends. Then once the pandemic hit they realized how important those relationships are. Sadly we had to celebrate many family gatherings and celebrations apart. As we go forward into this new year it is important to make time for family and friends. A commitment to family and relationships is important. Send cards, gifts, and little reminders about how much you care for those who are significant in your life. Think about ways to spend quality time together outside the home. How will we plan to gather together in this new year to make up for lost time apart.

2. Build Greater Support in Communities

So many organizations stepped up to fill the gaps of 2020. The need is high and with the affects to the economy it is time to strengthen community support. To all who did wellness checks, delivered meals and supplies, and offered messages of support; those acts of kindness mattered in 2020. But this year the need to focus on supporting local businesses, local organizations, and local churches is so crucial. We hopefully now are entering into the recovery phase of this pandemic. The time to provide generous support is now.

We have seen that this pandemic has changed the way we do business. Remote work is something many companies will continue to do after the dust has settled. Conference Calls probably are not going away either. We will most likely continue to offer online worship for those who did not have access to services before the pandemic to increase our commitment to accessibility for all.

The pathway forward is working in partnership using new methods to better balance time and resources. I will say the time and effort to do the online Homeless Remembrance Service and the Martin Luther King Jr. Service has required a significant effort in collaboration to be able to pull off. It is just one of the ways we have started to build stronger partnerships with those in our local community. The new warming shelter at the Dept. of Transition Assistance was a combined community effort to meet a need in our community. Starting this week we are beginning a new effort with the Baby Center to offer an online class to teach Financial Peace, a money management class to help people get out of debt and gain financial independence.

New things are already beginning to take place and there are lots of opportunities to give back and support the wider community. Generous giving will help with the recovery process.

3. The Church needs to be the Church

Dr. King wrote in his letter from Birmingham that “if the church of today does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authentic ring, forfeit the loyalty of millions and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century”.

The Church must proclaim the message of hope, the news of salvation, and be prophetic when speaking of justice for all. 2020 was more than just a year with a pandemic. It was also a year in which we saw the need to continue in the efforts of stopping racial hatred.

Next week I am going to speak more on that with our remembrance service for Dr. King. But I will say that the Book of Revelation says that in that new beginning there was every tribe and nation speaking in every tongue, and it sounded like the sound of a mighty rushing water. 2021 needs to be a year in which we speak truth in love as a new beginning to an old problem. We must stop racial hatred, and start a new in being the body of believers that is the Church that welcomes all in the name of Christ Jesus. The Church must be the Church in 2021, and we must use the voice God has given us to proclaim the message of Christ that teaches love and forgiveness.

CONCLUSION

This year will be a year of new beginnings and a new start. This is a year for renewal, restoration, and to restart things with a positive attitude. 2020 may have stopped the momentum of the world, but 2021 is the opportunity to get things going.

I will share this final thought as I conclude this message. John, who many scholars believe wrote the book of Revelation, was 90 years old when God gave him this vision. He was concerned what would happen to the Church after his death as the last living disciple of Jesus. And the Lord gave him this vision to write down. John was worried about the end of things. God showed him that it is not the end but only the beginning of the new things the Lord plans to do. The message of Christ is always a message of hope that new beginnings are possible. Let us enter this new year with that spirit of optimism.