

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend Alison Infante Zamor
Sunday, October 22, 2023

We hear our text today from The Book of Revelations, first in English and then in Spanish. We're in the 21st chapter and we're going to read verses 1- 4.

21 Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,”[a] for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. **2** I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. **3** 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 God’s people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. **4** ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’[b] or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

Here ends the reading. Amen.

That happened the first time when I was here. I was hearing all the pictures of mine when I was preaching, it was something like [Laughter] this, so I had experienced this before, so thank you so much for this opportunity to be here to share with you the word of the Lord. And for me there are a lot of good things happening at the same time. So it's my second time in this church with my people. You are my people, but this is the first time I'm here with my wife Sarah, which is a great blessing. Thanks, God. It's a great opportunity. Also, I'm bringing greetings on behalf of my family, Sarah and Joel David and Anna Paula, my children, and my congregation. Juan G. Hall Presbyterian Church in Cardenas, Cuba. I'm bringing greetings on behalf of the Presbyterian Reformed Church in Cuba as well. We just read a text from the scriptures, and something happened with the name of this book in Spanish, so you have already the translation of the name of this book in your version...in your English version. You call this text, this book, Revelation; but in Spanish the name of this book is Apocalypse; and when I say that word, it's the same word as a book word, but if I say Apocalypse, maybe there is a word in English and Spanish, well, that is apocalyptic. So usually when I ask anyone in my congregation or here what apocalyptic means, all the words coming had to do with destruction with destruction, with the end of the times, and many things that are not good at all. But we as people of God, we know very well that this text, this is an apocalyptic text, the one we read, and it had nothing to do with destruction. It has to do with hope. It has to do with justice. It has to do with love. It has to do with the power of God among us. So, but for the first receivers of this text very early in the first century, when they...they were in a very complex context. The Roman Empire had control of all the Mediterranean Sea, all around the Mediterranean. And for all those who confessed they were Christians, they knew very well what they had to face. They had to face persecution, torture, discredit, and defamation. However, the church was growing during that time, and the faith in Jesus Christ contains such a deep and renewing meaning that none of the dangers could stop that faith. So in that context I'm sure that those people, those very early Christians, they had a lot of questions about this new faith, that faith that had changed their lives. But they have big questions like, “Would we be wise to put our lives and the lives of our families in danger for Jesus? When will God put in order all...all these injustices that now we are suffering? Is the power of God greater than the power of the Roman Empire? So that's why...that's why this text of Revelations

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was written because it is a very important guide for the continuity of the message of salvation, in that time and for sure for us today as well. To be here for me is, as I said to the children in a few words, is to be ...to be a peacemaker. The only thing that to be here in front of you from Cuba with all my history of life, the history of my family, the history of my congregation, to share all these crises and all my hopes as a Cuban Christian is a sign of hope, because I realize that is not a path we have been walking alone. It is a path we have been walking together—this church and our church as only one people. And when we read this text, it's very important to realize which are the symbols contained in the text because Revelation is a very, very symbolic book, a very symbolic text; and then when the author of Revelation needed to take a symbol to express which is going to be, what's going to be this time when God is going to be with his people, then the symbol chosen by the author was not a military parade. That was very common during the Roman Empire. So the author could say when God comes, when Christ comes in his glory, he's going to be like a general in a parade with all the angels as soldiers. This was not the symbol. We could say as well when Christ comes into his kingdom, he's going to be like a king with many servants. This was not the symbol either. The symbol was a wedding. The symbol was a wedding. What a wedding means for us is this. In every place in the world, it has to do with hope. New things are growing like a new child maybe is coming. A wedding has to do with joy, with celebration, but a wedding has to do as well with commitment. So we have a proposal, we have a test to do. We have to do it to be together, and not only the couple in the wedding but whole families and friends and church and the neighborhood—all the things together had to have a commitment for that...that marriage to go on in a better way. So it's a wedding—the symbol of this encounter between God and his people. So that means joy, celebration, and commitment, and balance. That's what we are supposed to live in our everyday life here in the United States and there in Cuba and all over the world—this commitment of preaching the gospel with all the values of the gospel. And there are very important values contained in this text I read, because God is going to be there with his people, side by side, face to face, all the time together. So it's going to be something common, a regular communication. So this is not almighty and far away. God showed by this text that it's a partner, it's a friend, it's a...a couple, it's my child, it's my wife—that's God among us. And then we should start this new relationship since now we don't need to wait for a future to start this kind of new and good relations with one another, so God comes with us to start this new Jerusalem. By the way, we can have some confusion about when this text says 'all things are going to be new.' What it means is we don't have, we can not have a memory about what had happened before. It is the meaning of this text but not at all, because what is coming is that new Jerusalem. It means it's something we know, one that is a symbol of what's the meaning of Jerusalem. It's that commitment that's the relation of God with his people which is Israel, the ancient Israel. So it's a relation of protection and light for the people, so this is a reference, but things cannot be like before. So it's a New Jerusalem because many things need to be changed for better because we need to change our lives every single day for better, not only individually, but as a community, and then when we see our history we realize that it's not only our individual history, it's the history of our family, it's the history of our community, it's a history of the humanity with God. And then we need to remember that many things we are now have to do with a...a legacy of previous generations, and this is what the text is trying to say. This is a New Jerusalem where many things need to be renewed radically. Sometimes...many

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times, we need to change things, while always remembering that we have a legacy that is providing us support. So it's so good to realize that in this new reality there is no pain anymore, so we need to overcome these bad things of the past in a certain way. And that's what we are trying to do when we build together a community between Idlewild Presbyterian Church and Juan G Hall Presbyterian Church in Cuba. When we build together good and new things, then we're responding to God's demand on us. When I'm here and I look into your faces, I see new faces I have never seen before; but I could see in all faces where I can remember remember a lot of histories, a lot of things while we have been living together as churches for many, many years—more than 10 years, 11 years, I think. So it has to do with mutual growing in faith together. You have been showing us a lot of good things, and we have been learning about each other and in mutuality many, many good things. That's why when I see you here, I see good things like medicine for our people who now have no medicine. When I see you, I can see food for our people because you support our feeding programs for our people in our church, because there are people starving...starving to death. And still you are supporting our feeding programs. When I see you, I see people in prayer for our people in Cuba, for our church to continue to be a church in Cuba. When I see you, I remember so many particulars, good things happening as family while you are there on your mission trip. So this is the new way that God wants. We build a new Earth and a new Heaven where all these barriers that now are separating our governments, our countries, not our people, go away. We are very close. It doesn't matter about all the government problems that our countries have, but we are very close through Jesus Christ, through all things we do together, and all things we construct together. So my dear brothers and sisters, (that means I am going to finish, yes when I say that, my people know there in Juan G Hall that when I say “dear brothers and sisters” in my sermon, that means only one or a couple of minutes more, and they can rest.) So to be inspired by the scripture today means let us continue working together for this new Earth, for this new Heaven. So what we have to do... we know very well. Sometimes we're trying to do some things...some things that are not good at all, but we know they are not good things; so let us try to do the things God wants us to do today. This text confirms today that we need to rebuild, we need to restore, we need to renew all things, but always taking...always taking care about what previous generations did before us as a light to follow this path in Jesus. And then there's a new phrase that I just added to this sermon last night after an encounter when Sarah and I...we received the great visit of Pastor Ann Apple, and we were talking in Ann and James Ferguson's house. And then we were talking about many things, and suddenly Ann Apple said a phrase from a book, and this is the phrase. It's like a kind of confession. “I will not collude with despair.” With despair. “I will not collude with despair.” It's a phrase of John O'Donahue. I don't, I can't repeat very well this name, but you know what it means. That's what God is announcing with a new Earth and a new Heaven. In a new Earth and a new Heaven we will not collude with despair but with hope...but with hope, but with solidarity, but with comprehension, with pardon, with a commitment, with good things to add to the feast. The celebration of life can continue like Jesus did when he provided the best good wine in that party, you know, in Cana of Galilee. Suppose the party, the wedding was finished—no more wine, no more good wine; and then there was Jesus saying the celebration needed to continue. So these are my words for you. Thank you so much for this mutual respect, for this mutual path together in Christ, for all these stories we have been living in our life together with you as a congregation,

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with your support and your prayers. And then we are there as brothers and sisters and Cardenas, Cuba, waiting for you, waiting for you to come, waiting for you to be with us, if not physically, then spiritually, speaking and emotionally speaking with us together. Now and ever fighting for a new Earth and a new Heaven.

Thank you so much.