

When I say, “The end of times.” What images come to your mind? Anarchy, confusion, zombies? What we just read is from the Bible’s most complete picture of the “end times.” A beautiful picture of clean waters in a river whose source is God, lots of trees bearing fruit in all seasons. The picture of heaven given to us by Revelation is of heaven on earth. God doesn’t evacuate people from an earth God doesn’t care about; God comes to earth bringing healing and renewal to the earth and all creation. Barbra Rossing, a Revelation scholar from Lutheran Theological Seminary Chicago says, “Revelation is profoundly ecological in the sense of declaring God’s commitment to the earth, as the location of salvation.” Just as our bodies will be resurrected, all things will become new. When we enter the new heaven and earth we enter more deeply into the very same place.

God’s care for all of creation is one of the themes from Revelation that we have touched on over the last seven weeks as we read through this last book in the Bible. One of the other themes centers around a misconception about the book of Revelation; that it is a code to be broken, that there are hidden secrets. The truth is Revelation is filled with simple messages of hope and comfort. Today’s reading talks about “trees bearing fruit in all seasons” and this sounds like a novelty to us, who get apples flown in from another hemisphere during the winter, but in Biblical times and in the times of our grandparents and parents the summer’s produce needed to be preserved and properly stored with hopes that it would last until spring.

The word month comes from the word “moonth” since the moon takes about 30 days to go through a complete cycle of its phases—one revolution of the moon around earth. What we call February Native Americans called “Hungry Moon.” For my pioneer ancestors the spoilage of potato crop or the milk cow gone dry could have meant death in winter. Starvation was a very real fear for many throughout history. Revelation’s picture of heaven is simple but powerful; there will be enough in heaven. Trees bearing fruit in all seasons is a picture of the end of starvation—it is a picture almost allowing you to taste heaven.

In Revelation it says, “The former things have passed away.” When we say “passed away” we mean death. “Passed away” brings to mind family members and friends that have died. “Passed away” brings to mind passed decades and passed generations. We recall a world that has passed away. When people we know die, they take with them experiences: the Great Depression, the first threshing machine or churning butter on the porch. They take with them sounds and smells of home that has long been torn down. Their faces look back at us from photos in an album, from a time that is out of reach. When people who are closest to us pass away, part of our world passes away.

In Revelation “pass away” has the opposite meaning. We assume that things “pass away” when death comes, but in Revelation things “pass away” when death goes away. When Revelation says, “former things have passed away,” it means: “Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more.” Revelation’s vision of

the future includes human beings and all creation. Though out Revelation God is identified as Creator. To speak of the future as new creation is not to deny the value of the first creation. It is to affirm that **creation** is what God does. **Creation is on going not an item to check off a list.** For us and the world to which we belong death is real. Revelation tells of the defeat of all the forces that hold us captive to death. In Christ, there is the promise of resurrection. Resurrection is an act of creation. God is restless to redeem, God promises to create us and our world—new **again**.

Revelation does not speak alone. The opening of chapter 21 is a chorus of Biblical promises that have been made real. The words of the prophets are taken up and sung again: “I saw a new heaven and new earth,” Third Isaiah (65); “God’s dwelling place is among people,” Ezekiel (37); “God makes all things new,” First Isaiah (43). The use of language from the prophets is the crescendo of Revelation emphasizing God’s trustworthiness. What God has spoken, God will do. Revelation’s vision for the future does not rely on an optimistic reading of the present; sin, evil and death are real now and call the future into question. Yet the prophets, Revelation and the Gospel bring a word of hope into the present by affirming that the God that has created all things, is the same God who brings all thing to their completion.

The world’s existence and our own existence are framed and rooted in the presence and the promise of God. We know that death is real for those we love and for ourselves and recall in that same instant that death is not final. In God, the future holds the promise of life... where

death itself has passed away. Jesus’ love floats us on the waters of life. Jesus’ love comforts and supports us when we fall. Jesus’ love stands with us as we proclaim the profound truth of the Gospel the Good News that all creation is worthy of life and love and our profound joy is living out that love in our daily lives. Amen.