

All things new

Revelation 21.1-6a

Rev Dr Jos M. Strengholt

In my pastoral practice I came to the conclusion that all people, all people, are needy people; we are full of problems, full of dreams and hopes that will often not be met, full of tears and pain. And especially death is a mean mean enemy.

Most people are great at masking all the internal turmoil, but it is there anyway. And we all desire renewal, better times, a real change.

And this is the promise of the Gospel. It will happen. And the change has already begun. God is coming and we hear his footsteps.

1. A new heaven and a new earth

The apostle John was a real visionary - he had a vision given to him by God of your great future. or rather, of the future of heaven and earth. We await a new heaven and a new earth.

And let me underline from the outset - the christian view of the future is not about escapism. It is not about saying farewell to this earth.

“Throughout the entire bible the ultimate destiny of God’s people is an earthly destiny”, according to George Eldon Ladd, a biblical scholar.

The Greeks desired liberation of the body, to live in a spiritualized universe - singing in the clouds. The Jewish-Christian view always keeps us with both feet on the ground of this earth.

Andreas of Caesarea, a Greek theological writer and bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, wrote the oldest commentary on the Book of Revelation that we still possess - in the 7th century. He writes,

“This passage does not speak of the obliteration of creation but of its renewal into something better.”

God will make all things new; that means that this present reality will be made better, yes perfect - but it will not be swept away. But all that is evil will be removed from it.



Like the sea - which in ancient days was a scary enemy. And for the people of God it also symbolized the nations around, that like the waves of the sea often tried to overwhelm the people of God.

Do you sometimes feel that the reality of life almost overwhelms you? The problems, your issues, the headaches? our circumstances can be like a roaring sea. But God promises renewal. He is in the process of creating a world where you can feel at home; where there are no more enemies; no more disappointments; no more depressing feelings; no more pain and no more tears. Where people will not die; where you have your loved ones with your forever.

How will this happen? When the holy city Jerusalem descends from God, says John. God takes the initiative and he makes heaven and earth one again.

The New Testament sees a New Jerusalem as the dwelling place of God, the true homeland of the saints. This is, in New Testament terms, the dwelling place of 'the spirits of just men made perfect'.

The New Jerusalem is where God lives, with all angels and with all of our friends and family- members who have passed away in the faith of Jesus Christ. My father, who died when I was 13, is there; And the apostles Paul and Peter; and my faithful grandparents.

And the baby that you were pregnant of but it was never born. And your brother who died too young. And your friend who died of cancer. They are there with God.



But where they are now is not their permanent residency. They wait for that day when God reunites heaven and earth. Then their spiritual bodies will be clothed with flesh and blood again, to live with us, forever in this new world of God.

So do not despair even in your darkest moments. Your loved ones are with God and he will bring you together again. And your sadness will not have the last word. God has the last word. He, the creator of all things, will re-create all things.

And he already begun that proces. The apostle Paul says that anyone who is in Christ, is already a new creation. You are already a new creation because you belong to the Creator who has made you part, even now, of this new world. We are already part of this new Jerusalem.

2. Because God comes to live with the people

When God and his saints come to our world, all things will be renewed. The secret is in the presence of God himself; when he is fully present in this world, that means eternal life - eternal joy. When He comes, all things are perfected because He is perfect.

Some people use these ideas of God creating a new earth, but in a secularized form. They have the dream but they think we have to build this new Utopia with our own hands.

People who believe in Utopia without God, can be scary. Plato believed in a world that would be ruled by the best citizens. Who are the best?

Karl Marx believed in a millennium of equality and justice and wanted to shape the world as clay into his ideal form. What this leads to we have seen in Lenin, Stalin, Pol Pot, chairman Mao. 100 million people killed because in order to achieve the perfect world we have to get rid of all enemies first.

Not so with the new world God promises. It will only come when he comes. We cannot bring it any closer. We cannot draw God down by our activities. He will come; He will do it. This is a beautiful Reformation idea. Salvation comes from God, we cannot buy it, or achieve it.

We believe that God will come; He will do it; He himself will act. Let me read the central verses from Revelation 21 again:

"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;
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."

Central is, that God will make his home with us again. He will dwell with us as our God. This is paradise restored; God will walk in his garden of earth again.

The home of God, that is his temple. A temple will no longer be needed because the whole world will be God's house, and like Adam and Eve, we will work this earth again.

We will be his peoples. Peoples - plural. The reality of national or racial differences are not negated. We see again this idea of continuity. But the peoples are no longer the enemies of the people of God. All peoples, all nations, will serve him.

And because he is in our midst, pain, and tears and sorrows will be a matter of the past. Maybe you had good reasons to shed tears this week, but then, no more. His presence makes all the difference.

And this is, even today, greatly comforting for us. Not only because we know that one day, there will no more misery, even no memory of misery.

But even today God is among his people. Not in the complete manner in which he will one day be with us. But to a certain extent, he is also today with us. He told his disciples, 'See I am with you till the end of the age.' So even in this world where God seems so far, he is already with us.

He is with you now. Even now he is offering to wipe your tears away, to comfort you, to encourage you. He knows you, He is close to you, He loves you, He cares for you.

And God, who is present with us and also at the same time with the saint in heaven, he actually connects us with these saints in heaven. We live with the saints in the New Jerusalem. And especially when we worship God at his table, as the saints in heaven worship God at his table, this brings us very close to our loved ones who are up there.



When you receive Holy Communion, they surround us as a cloud of witnesses.

They encourage us to keep the faith, and to not lose courage in our daily life full of challenges. And they pray with us and for us.

3. God can be trusted

This is not a sort of wishful thinking, nice idea, but who knows....

The one addressing us in this vision of John, is the one who sits on the throne of God himself. He ends with three empathic lines:

"See, I am making all things new."

Yes, we love that and we need this. We need this hope today, we need to be sure that with all creation we will also be renewed.

In Isaiah, 43.19, God promised: I will do new things. That was still future tense in the Old Testament. But in the book of Revelation, God no longer says that he will one day make all things new... He says that he is already doing it.

"I am making" all things new. That is the exact translation of the Greek John uses. Present continuous tense.

It has begun though Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection. That was the beginning of God's recreation of the world. And he is now doing it. And we are part of this new world.

And if you sometimes doubt? The one sitting in the throne says, 'you better believe it, because

“these words are trustworthy and true.”

They are true, so you can trust them. In the beginning of the book of Revelation, in chapter 3.14, Jesus is called the Trustworthy and the True one - and because he is trustworthy and true, when he speaks, we can trust his words.

We can be sure that God has already begun the process of our complete renewal, and he will finish it. He has already begun to comfort you and to care for you today, and he will complete that process. Because the one in the throne who speaks these words to us, is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ himself. He says:

"It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

It is done. God's recreation of this world is a done deal. Because on the cross Jesus could shout, 'it is finished', that is why he can say with certainty, about the renewal of the world, 'It is done'.

And who is he? The Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He is the one on the throne of the universe.

In Revelation 1.8, in the beginning of the book we read: "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

In Revelation 22.12,13, you can read: "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last."

Who is the Alpha and the Omega? The Lord God; Jesus Christ. His words are true and trustworthy. He has started the program of your recreation, and he will finish it.

Conclusion

You will see your loved ones again; our farewells now, are not forever;

With your loved ones God holds you in his hands - and in God's hands you are so close to those that have departed this life.

When we celebrate holy communion we worship God together with all his saints who surround us.

And as God has fully comforted those in heaven; he has wiped of their tears; so today he also comforts us.

And the best guarantee of this glorious hope, is that God Almighty, Jesus Christ is trustworthy and faithful to his promises.

+ Amen.