

Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5

In the spirit the angel carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day-- and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Jesus Wins

I was thinking about the phenomenon of “cliff hangers” these days.

- It used to be that you’d go to the movies and the twists and turns in the plot kept you on the edge of your seat.
 - Jurassic Park - How are they going to get off this island? Are they all going to get eaten by dinosaurs?
- But now, Hollywood really has got us because now they release an entire season of a show at once so it’s 8 or 12 episodes and every single episode manages to end with such drama and suspense.

- It's like every episode manages to end in a life and death scenario.
 - Your spouse is like, "Honey, we have a reservation at 7:30. Time to go." And you respond, "But I'm watching this show and she's trapped in the bottom of the boat and it's sinking and water is pouring in and she's just taken her last breath and a shark's swimming by...."
- > Oh, and the next episode starts automatically, before you have time to hit the pause button.

I've got to know how it's going to end. I need to know what happens next. I need to know the ending, not just of this episode, but of the entire story.

Is that one of the things that makes our lives the most difficult? It feels so out of control when we don't know what is going to happen next. We don't know what tomorrow will bring. Anything is possible.

- Our kids could turn out OK... or they might not.
- We might die peacefully in our sleep... or we might slowly become incapacitated and die a painful death.
- The American Experiment might work out – government for the people and by the people might not perish from the face of this earth... or we could devolve into warring tribes or sell ourselves to the highest corporate bidder.

There is no way to know exactly how our lives will go. Every single person here has experienced days filled with weeping. We've all buckled under the weight of anxiety or stress at some time or another. We've gotten phone calls that changed everything. We've held loved ones' hands for the last time. Anything could happen next. **I just wish we knew how it's all going to end.**

So, let me ask you this question: **How would you live your life differently if you actually knew the end of the story? And what if the end of the story is far, far better than anything you ever could have imagined?**

- Do you know what our opening collect says today? "O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such

love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord....”

Why don't you think for a moment of some of the very best days that you've ever had. I wonder what comes to mind for you. We almost have to wade through the distractions and the clutter and the superficiality to get there. (Getting a new car is really great, but that has nothing on working so hard to finish high school or college, and looking down to see your parents there beaming, and the joy and pride they have, not so much at your accomplishments, but just from being able to see you grow up.)

- Sometimes it's those big occasions that really are the best days, and other times it's something little. Just a moment of clarity and presence. In parenting, young children, I get to see my kids experience things for the very first time, like the other evening when I cut up some fresh strawberries and said to them, "You've probably never had strawberries and cream before, have you?" Or I remember that night when they saw their first shooting stars – the gift of joy and wonder in all of God's works.
- Sometimes you have to pinch yourselves because it's hard to believe how wonderful this life truly is.

In the Book of Revelation this morning, guess what happens? We get to know the end of the story and it's so much better, so much more beautiful, so much more peaceful and complete than anything we could ever imagine.

- "In the spirit," it says, "the angel carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. I saw no temple in that city, for its temple is the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day – and there will be no night there. All that is false, all that is not of God will fall away. There you will find those who are written in the Lamb's book of life." (Rev. 21:10-22)

You see, all of our longings, all of our grief, all of our mistakes come down to a deep restlessness we have – a restlessness of body, heart, and soul. Our hearts are restless until we find rest in God.

- That rest is coming. It's guaranteed. It's already breaking into the world.

- The New Creation with the river of the water of life is flowing through us, right through that baptismal font. The Tree of Life for the healing of the nations is the cross of Christ. God makes flowers to bloom from that old rugged cross.
- When we come into church, we enter into something other worldly, things into which angels long to look.
 - > The stories told here are the very Word of God spoken into our lives.
 - > The sacrament is the medicine of immortality.
 - > Our choir does not sing alone, but we are joined by angels and archangels and all the company of heaven.

This all changes us. It changes us to know the end of the story.

There's that old spiritual which sings of this river: I'm going to lay my burdens down, where?

We live differently when we know that God is in control.

- We don't need to win every battle because God has already won.
- We can endure hardship because we know it won't last forever.
- We can share God's healing with the wounded because God's healing has already started flowing through us.
- We can lay down our sword and shield down by the riverside. I ain't gonna study war no more.

How are you going to live life differently now that you know the end of the story?

I once heard the story of a college student who was studying religion. The Book of Revelation was all the rage at that time. It was being turned into a sort of sci-fi apocalyptic action story. So, this college student met a pastor who had been one of the Lost Boys of Sudan. As a child he had walked more than 1,000 miles, to save his life, from South Sudan to Kenya.

- "How do you read the Book of Revelation?" the pastor was asked. He answered, "It says that Jesus wins."
- That's the end of the story.