

May 29, 2022
Memorial Day Weekend

Revelation 22:12-14,16-17,20-21

“It’s a Date!”

Here we are on Memorial Day weekend! A weekend *known* for picnics, get-a-ways, bar-b-ques, and other recreational realities. It is, of course, *named* for remembering those who died fighting for our country so we can have picnics and all the rest. ***It is a strange mix, isn’t it?*** It doesn’t make sense to feel guilty that we do things other people fought so we could do them – but it doesn’t feel right to *take benefits without remembering* the people who don’t get to enjoy them. So let’s remember them.

This mixture of emotions is something we encounter reading the book of Revelation. Woven into this story and book is the wildest mixture of images and descriptions. When you sit down and read this book there is a reason we don’t easily understand it. *We aren’t supposed to.* Revelation is what is called, “Apocalyptic Literature” and we don’t have any background with that sort of literature. The keys are not easily within reach to unlock the treasure that is in this odd and graphic letter. Its message would have been plainer to those to whom it was written in code than it is to us. Code was used to protect the author and those who read it from retribution. Memorial Day is a good day to read from Revelation because it was written in the face of *loss, death, and discouragement.* Revelation assumes the world is so messy only God can make it right.

Our passage today at the end of the letter is tied to the beginning of the letter and to passages from Isaiah and Numbers which tell of ***the triumph of the Messiah.*** Which, of course, is the foundation upon which *everything* rests. It is the answer to all our life questions which boil down to: “*Why does this all have to be so hard and hurt so much?*” And yet, Revelation’s answer is a bit less clear than we might like. Kind of like *God’s answer to Job* at the end of the book where Job is asked, “*Were you there when I laid the foundations of the earth?*” The answer gives ***not a simple solution but a larger life in which to live.***

The irony is that over the years Revelation has become *the go to book* for people wanting *a simple solution.* People wanting reaffirmation that we are the good guys and those people over there are the bad guys. *God loves us and will punish the bad people – you know – people we don’t like.* For proof they might point to the beginning of our passage: “*my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone’s work.”* That sounds pretty “judgy” doesn’t it?

Yet, what is promised is **reward**. Reward given according to how we live. This passage at best implies that if you haven't done well there isn't reward for you. This is not *a threat so much as a promise*. A promise that **our lives matter** and what we do matters. Our choices set our destiny. What we do matters as we are a blessing or not to our neighbors. What we do matters because God would like to say to us, "*Well done good and faithful servant,*" and God *only* tells the truth.

We need to be very careful here – what we do matters, what we do does not redeem us – Christ – the worthy lamb who was slain is the one who redeems. Our efforts to do well in life, do good to others and make God proud all happen *because the one who is the beginning and the end*, the one who holds all of life in holy hands has redeemed us.

The depths of grace show up at the end of this passage with invitation after invitation ending with "*Let **anyone who wishes** take the water of life as a gift.*" In the end, it is *our desire and not our credentials* which lead us to the water of life. A desire and thirst for God.

We have dipped our toe in the very end of a complex book of the Bible. But friends, we have read the important part. The invitation and assurance from Christ that he will prevail in *even our most difficult challenges* and the most broken parts of our world. Who is this one who invites us? *The bright and morning star*.

In what seems like a lifetime ago, I was working the overnight shift on a drilling rig in the wilds of Oklahoma. I was new at the work and every hour seemed longer because I had to work twice as hard to get by. In the midst of exhaustion and the sense that ordinary life would *never* return, the darkness began to recede, and the sky held a battle between the dark and the dawning light with stars providing accent lights. There were moments thick clouds darkened the horizon as if night would return. But you knew...you just knew watching it that the light would come. The light had already won – day was dawning. This is what I hear when Jesus says, "*I am coming soon.*" This is what we count on when we live life **in between the light and the darkness**...what holds it all together in our living is that the light of Christ has come into the world – and even in our most difficult moments we may say – "Yes, come Lord Jesus – we shine for you – meet us that we may be together - it's a date!" All roads lead to your victory – we will meet you there.