

The Lutheran Church of the Atonement  
Florissant, Missouri  
The Sixth Sunday of Easter -- Year C  
May 21-22, 2022  
Acts 16:9-15; St. John 14:23-29  
Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5

How many of us have decided, at one time or another, that we were going to read the entire Bible from start to finish? And, we sit down with Genesis, and, frankly, Genesis reads like a soap-opera. You have murder, you have adultery, you have incest, you have betrayal, you have seduction, you have abandonment, you have perversion, you have false accusations, you have treachery, you have stunning successes and colossal failures. Genesis. It's a great read. And, then, you get to Exodus, and for the first half of the book it's more of the same, filled with expectation and drama, with the great struggles between slavery and freedom, between life and death. And, then, about half-way through Exodus you get bogged down. You get all of these detailed instructions about what to do when an ox gores someone to death or when your enemy's donkey dies or when someone digs a pit and fails to cover it or when someone borrows something but dies and cannot return it or when one person's animal grazes in another person's field. And, after a few chapters of these guidelines and directions you close the book and just never quite get around to picking it up again.

Which is a shame!

For the concluding chapters of Exodus are all about God's determination to come to His people and to take up residence among them. The second half of Exodus is all about building a Tabernacle for God, so that God can come and live among His people, can travel with His people, can comfort and reassure and guide and direct His people -- and ultimately keep all of His promises to His people. All this happens, not without struggle and sacrifice and setback,.....remember the golden calf.....but, in the end, the Tabernacle is completed, and God comes with cloud and fire and glory to take up residence in it.

But, in so many ways, that is the story of the Scriptures: God's determination, despite struggle and setback, to come and live among His precious people. So, all the way back in early chapters of Genesis, God comes to the man in the garden to walk with him in the cool of the day.

And, so God dwells with His people through their sojourn in the wilderness, again, not without struggle and setback. So, God enters the Promised Land with His people. And, when the Tabernacle gives way to the Temple, God takes up residence there, filling the house of the Lord with cloud and fire and glory. This is the story of the Scriptures: God's determination to come and dwell with His people. This is the movement of the Scripture, not us going up to God, but God coming down to us.

So, even when God's people's unfaithfulness finally compels God to leave His Temple, nonetheless, He leaves, promising to return, to come back. So, in Ezekiel, "I will [return and] dwell in their midst forever." So, in Zechariah, "Lo, your king comes to you, triumphant and victorious is he." So, in Malachi, "The Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His Temple."

This is no unkept promise. So, John the Baptist echoes Isaiah: "Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight." So, Matthew refers to Jesus as "Emmanuel; God is with us." So, John declares that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us," (literally) "tabernacled among us." Notice the movement, notice the direction. This is not us going up to God. This is God coming to dwell with us.

All of which brings us to the three Lessons from the end of the book of Revelation, which form the Second Lessons for the last three Sundays of the Easter season, of which today's Second Lesson is the middle one. For, if God coming to live with His people is the beginning of the story in Genesis, if God's

determination to return to His people is the story of the Hebrew Scriptures, if God's coming to us in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth is the story of the Gospels, then God's determination to come to us in the fullness of His glory is the end of the story in Revelation. So, last week we heard: "Behold, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be His people. And God Himself will be with them." Moments ago, we heard of the holy city coming down out of heaven, but that there is no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb. And, next week, we will hear the Lord Jesus declare, "Behold, I am coming soon" and, again, "Surely, I am coming soon."

Why does this matter? Because, so much of our piety, so much of our popular culture, even so much of our hymnody points us in the opposite direction. "When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation, and take me home...." Or, "safely past the foe to our home we go." Or (at a more popular level) "I'll fly away, I'll fly away, to a home on God's celestial shore." You get the idea.... These hymns [and countless more] aren't about God coming to dwell with His people, but about us flying off to be with God.

So, why does this matter? Because it causes us to lose sight of the significance of Easter. It causes us to lose sight of the necessity of the Resurrection. For Easter is not just the happy ending to a sad story, not just a signal that some day we'll "fly away." No, Easter is the beginning, ...the beginning of God's new creation. Easter is the launching of God's "new heaven and new earth" project. Easter is the assurance that God will in the end restore the earth to the glory it had at creation. And, Jesus's Resurrection is the assurance that we too will be raised to share again in that new and restored creation, and that God will again come and dwell among His people and will walk with us, just as He walked with Adam in the garden.

This is the Easter hope; this is the Resurrection promise that Paul shares with his friends in Rome, that the "whole creation," which "has been groaning in travail (the pangs of childbirth) until now"... "will be set free from its bondage to decay," and that we will share in "the redemption of our bodies." This is the hope. This is the promise of Easter.

Yes, Genesis is a great read; Exodus is a great read; the whole Bible is a great read. And, as with any great read, it all comes together at the end; everything that came before makes sense at the end. These final three Sundays of Easter allow us to see how it all ends, how it all comes together, how it all makes sense. And, this is how this great read ends. God restores His creation to its original goodness and glory. "Behold!" He says, "I make all things new." God raises us as His beloved people with new, glorious imperishable resurrected bodies to share in His renewed creation. And, then, God gets His wish. Then, God keeps his promise. Then, God comes down to dwell with His people, and to walk with us in His garden in the cool of the day. "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." Amen