

A New Creation – 2. A Special Responsibility

Genesis 1:28-31, 9:8-17

April 21, 2024

Pastor Tami Luckhardt

Today, we continue in our sermon series, *A New Creation* and, to get started, I'm going to need your help. I have a series of questions for you, and I invite you to respond.

What makes a good leader? Things like, listening, compassion, communication, understanding, organization, respect, a good servant, empathy. What makes a bad leader? Things like stubbornness, indecisiveness, controlling, angry, paranoid, closed-mindedness, mean, power hungry, self-centered. How many of you have had a bad boss at some point in your life? I think most of us can think of at least one boss that was bad. Can you remember a good boss that you had at some point in your life? Hopefully, most of us can remember that good boss and maybe even their name. There is something about a good leader that leaves a lasting impression on who we are. Maybe you can think of someone from your past who you said, "I want to be just like them when I grow up." How many of you are trying now to be that person to someone else? Maybe you're doing it where you work or for your kids or grandkids. Maybe you're mentoring a confirmand or teaching Kids Street or Youth Group or maybe you're doing it in your community where you are reading tutor, coaching a sports team, or leading scouts. The best thing we can do for another person is to be the person we needed when we were younger. Let me be the kind of boss, parent, friend, sister, brother that I needed when I was growing up.

You might be wondering, what does this have to do with Genesis or creation? I invite you to think about the ways that we lead and what we have been gifted as human beings in this great creation story. You might remember that there are two creation narratives in Genesis, and they are very different. In the first narrative, in Genesis 1, read today, humans are created on the last day. On the sixth day of Creation, humanity is brought forth along with all other living creatures. We don't even get our own day – but we do receive a special blessing and responsibility: stewardship of all of God's good work (verse 28). The beauty and resources of the created world are gifted to us, they are on loan to us, to aid humanity in our work of filling the earth and growing the human family. Along with these gifts comes the simultaneous responsibility of making sure those good resources are equitably available "to everything that breathes." (Gen. 1:30).

In Genesis 2, humans are created first and then everything else after that. But the end message, or the moral of both narratives is the same, humans are to be good caretakers/stewards of what God has created. The order in which things were created can influence our view of where humans fall in priority to everything else and how we operate in the world. Whether you believe we were created first because we are so special or that God saved the best for last, this line of thinking can lead us to believe that we get to oversee everything else so to serve our own needs and desires. So, we begin to look at the world around us as ours for the taking.

Do you remember learning about manifest destiny in your US History class? It was the idea that white Americans were divinely ordained to settle the entire continent of North America. It inspired a variety of measures designed to remove or destroy the native population. The colonists looked out at the vastness of the land to the west and said, "We want that." It did not matter to them what was between them and the west coast. They saw it as their right, even though there were other human beings already living there.

So we have this historical perspective where we look at the world around us and ask, how can this serve me? How can this forest serve me? How can this river serve me? It is heartbreaking to drive by places that used to cover in nature that are now being torn down for homes, stores, parking lots. If you are old enough, you might remember Joni Mitchell's song Big Yellow Taxi, *They paved paradise and put up a parking lot with a pink hotel, a boutique, and a swinging hot spot. Don't it always seem to go that you don't know what you got 'til it's gone? They paved paradise and put up a parking lot.*

And what happens when we look at the created world as something there to serve us, we then begin to look at each other and say, you're also here to serve me. Like manifest destiny, if I want it, I'll take it. Or as the saying goes... What do April showers bring? Mayflowers. What do Mayflowers bring? Pilgrims. What do pilgrims bring? Smallpox blankets. Do you know that part of our history? In 1763, the British soldiers at Fort Pitt, now present-day Pittsburgh, gave blankets infected with smallpox to the Native Americans as a strategy to win the war. We live in a world where for centuries we have looked at other people as things we can walk over or dominate.

In doing my research for this message today, I learned something new about John Wesley from another pastor talking about her doctoral dissertation. For those of you who have studied Wesley before, you may recall the Sophia Hopkey and John Wesley controversy. If you haven't heard this story or don't remember, here's a quick recap. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, came to America as a missionary, and when he was on the 4-month journey sailing across the Atlantic Ocean, he met Sophia Hopkey when her mother asked him to teach her to speak French. At first, they were just friends, but that friendship turned romantic but, as the long-told story goes, John just couldn't get his act together to ask Sophia to marry him. And so someone else proposed to her first and she ended up marrying him instead. John was so mad at Sophia for marrying someone else that he refused to serve her communion. So, he had to flee the country because they were going to arrest him and put him on trial. That's the story that has been told and believed for so long. But that appears there might be more to the story.

What might have really happened was that Wesley and Sophia did have a deep friendship that eventually turned romantic. But Sophia's parents were concerned about John's ability to provide for their daughter. So, she ended up not marrying John Wesley but instead, a person who owned slaves. Now Wesley was adamant that slavery was a sin and an abomination. He and Sophia had had conversations about this so when she chose to marry a slave owner, Wesley said, "I cannot serve communion to an individual who owns other human beings."

For years, we've believed that John Wesley was just a scorned lover in refusing to serve Sophia communion. But instead, it appears that he was taking a brave, bold stance. The reason he got chased out of Georgia was not because he was a scorned lover who wouldn't serve Sophia communion but instead, because he was so vocally and publicly denouncing slavery. That was why they came after him. That's why they were going to put him on trial and that's why he had to flee back to England.

I tell you this story because it is a great reminder to us of who we are. This desire to be the people who look at the world and say, to be the people that God created us to be, we must ask the hard questions, listen to the difficult answers and stand up for those who cannot advocate for themselves. So, our question should be, as the ones who have been told to take charge/ given dominion over all of creation, *How are we being good leaders for each other and for the whole world?* How do we begin to be empathetic, deep listeners and servant leaders? Do we care for other people and the natural world more than we care about ourselves? How do we

care about the wellbeing of this gift that God has given to us, using that good steward mentality to be people who deeply shift and challenge the norms of this world? Whether that's the way that we interact with each other, the world, or the way that we stand up to the injustices that exist all around us.

Let's talk about the word "dominion" for a minute because it is a challenging word. It sometimes implies some level of control, harshness and violence, (like in, domination). But by using the Wesleyan Quadrilateral of scripture, tradition, experience, and reason, we can make a solid case that our special responsibility as humans towards creation is one of "stewardship" not "domination." And yet, passages like Genesis 1 have been misused to justify violence against and the exploitation of natural resources and animals. Dominion, in this context, means to care for what we have been given.

So, when God sits before Adam and Eve and says, *Look at all this! It is your responsibility to make sure that what I have created continues to thrive.* When God hands that power and authority over to Adam and Eve, it is a to help creation thrive, not to strangle it and wring every ounce of worth from it for their own power and wellbeing.

I realize that we live in a world that is deeply caught up in acquiring power and authority and that you and I are not going to be able to single-handedly change the world, but we can do small things in big ways. All significant change begins with us shifting the little things that we do. This is not just about global warming and climate change but also about food security. There is more than enough food grown in the world to feed every single person every day. And yet, every minute, somewhere in the world, a child dies from malnutrition. In fact, there are kids right here in our community who, from when they go home from school on Friday until they go back on Monday and get that school breakfast, will not have enough food to eat or a nutritious meal all weekend.

It is not because they have terrible parents, everyone is trying to do the best they can with what they have. But this society that we live in makes it hard to break the cycle of poverty. So how do we, as a follower of Christ, begin to meet those needs? In her book, *Saving Us*, Katharine Hayhoe says but, "As humans, we are prone to tuning out repeated bad messages if they do not relate directly to our lives, or if we feel like fixing them would be even worse for us than letting them run their course." So we need to help change that mindset. It's when one tiny little act, that doesn't feel like a whole lot in and of itself, meets with one other tiny act, the impact grows and people's lives are touched, changed, and transformed. That is what we are called to do as children of God.

John Wesley taught that there are three dimensions to humanity's creation in the image of God: the natural image, the moral image, and the political image. And by political, he doesn't mean are you democrat, republican or independent. The political image refers to humanity's calling to care for the earth and the other creatures that inhabit it. Just as God is Ruler over all creation, so humanity is caretaker and of this world. Humanity is to be the deliverer of the blessings of God to our fellow creatures.

In 1908, the Methodist Church was the first denomination to write a Social Creed but long before that, John Wesley believe that Methodists should be engaged in healing a broken world. I am so grateful to be a part of a denomination that is involved with people's lives, with political and social struggles, that has local and international mission implications. Because when there is pain and suffering in the world, God also feels pain. So how do we love justice, do kindness, and walk humbly with God? The UMC Social Creed addresses that. Here's what it says:

We believe in God, Creator of the world; and in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of creation. We believe in the Holy Spirit, through whom we acknowledge God's gifts, and we repent of our sin in misusing these gifts to idolatrous ends.

We affirm the natural world as God's handiwork and dedicate ourselves to its preservation, enhancement, and faithful use by humankind.

We joyfully receive for ourselves and others the blessings of community, sexuality, marriage, and the family.

We commit ourselves to the rights of men, women, children, youth, young adults, the aging, and people with disabilities; to improvement of the quality of life; and to the rights and dignity of all persons.

We believe in the right and duty of persons to work for the glory of God and the good of themselves and others and in the protection of their welfare in so doing; in the rights to property as a trust from God, collective bargaining, and responsible consumption; and in the elimination of economic and social distress.

We dedicate ourselves to peace throughout the world, to the rule of justice and law among nations, and to individual freedom for all people of the world.

We believe in the present and final triumph of God's Word in human affairs and gladly accept our commission to manifest the life of the gospel in the world. Amen.

So that's the United Methodist Church's Social Creed as it stands now. In 1972, the Social Principles were added. These are not laws, they are not binding but they are meant to help us understand how we can speak to the issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation addressing things like the digital world, the environment, health care, poverty, human trafficking, slavery, and the list goes on.

So how is this faith community called Messiah Church faithfully living into our Social Creed and Principles so to provide God's blessings to others? The first thing that comes to mind today is the team of 15 we will be commissioning this Sunday that will spend a week on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. This is our 6th team to go and each time we go, it is with the hope of sharing God's love through meeting some of their most basic, human needs, things like—making and delivery beds, digging outhouses, working in the community gardens, and winterizing trailers. It is also a time of deep listening as they learn more about the Lakota culture and history.

For years, we have been donating snacks to Oakwood Elementary School, just across the street, so kids' tummies are full so that they can learn. Our Totes for Hope mini-food shelf is a reminder to our Bloom families that Messiah Church cares about them as we send them home with a bag of groceries to meet that day's needs. One last way that I want to share with you today that you caring for God's creation is through your generous giving to our Easter Offering this year. You might remember that our goal was to raise \$12,000 for Bloom scholarships and \$12,000 for our area food shelves. Well, you did it again. You far exceeded those goals with \$19,000 being given towards Bloom scholarships and \$17,000 given to our area food shelves. Let's not forget the 253 boxes of cereal that our Kids Street kids collected that will also go to our area food shelves. These are just a few ways that popped to mind for today's message. A reminder that together, we are doing so much to care for this world.

So while I don't think that you and I are going to be able to shift the entire system, what can you do to continue to be good stewards of what God has given you. A couple of weeks ago in my first message in this series, I challenged you personally to start doing one new thing to care for God's creation. So, what's your one thing? Do you know yet? Are you still thinking? In two weeks, I am going to invite you to share your one thing in worship.

April 22 is Earth Day. Earth Day began in response to a massive oil spill off the coast of Southern California in 1969, What began as a grass-roots movement organized and led by young activists and volunteers, is now recognized as the launch of the environmental

movement, and is observed in nearly 200 countries around the world. Each year, Earth Day has a theme that focuses on environmental concerns. The theme for Earth Day 2024 is Planet vs. Plastics. We have a plastic problem. Microplastics are tiny particles of plastic, measuring less than 5 millimeters in diameter and they are showing up in our lungs, blood, mother's placentas, and breast milk. They carry chemicals that cause long-term damage or disrupt our health and the developing immune system of fetuses. So reducing our use of plastics can help with this problem

Buy plastic-free products

Avoid using plastic food containers, plastic bags

Reduce the use of plastic utensils

Choose clothing with natural fibers

Use natural cleaning products.

As it says on the Earth Day website, it's not a day, it's a movement. It is my hope that this is not just a sermon series but "here-to-stay, ongoing, growing ministry" at Messiah Church because that is what we are created to do. To be good leaders, who show the world what it means to be empathetic, compassionate, and deep listeners... to inspire others to be better versions of themselves, to bring glory to God and be grateful for all that we have been given dominion over. What if we took our leadership seriously, this biblical command to be leaders over creation, to do a good job over it, today and every day.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of April 21, 2024

Weekly Prayer

Amazing God, you made human beings to reflect your image. Together with creation, we reflect the fullness of the image of God. You give us a special responsibility to care for creation and one another with compassion. In this interdependent relationship, creation sustains us. May the Holy Spirit call me to new life with creation, Amen.

Monday, April 22, Earth Day

Scripture: Matthew 6:26-30; John 1:1-5

Look at the birds in the sky. They don't sow seed or harvest grain or gather crops into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth much more than they are? Who among you by worrying can add a single moment to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? Notice how the lilies in the field grow. They don't wear themselves out with work, and they don't spin cloth. But I say to you that even Solomon in all of his splendor wasn't dressed like one of these. If God dresses grass in the field so beautifully, even though it's alive today and tomorrow it's thrown into the furnace, won't God do much more for you, you people of weak faith?

In the beginning was the Word
and the Word was with God
and the Word was God.

The Word was with God in the beginning.
Everything came into being through the Word,
and without the Word
nothing came into being.

What came into being
through the Word was life,

and the life was the light for all people.
The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light.

Observation

Jesus lived in a society shaped in part by the Psalms, which spoke of all creation praising God (Psalm 98:7-8). To teach people to trust God's providing heart, it was natural for Jesus to point to the birds and the flowers -- aspects of our world we tend to take for granted or dismiss as "just natural." When we begin to see the world through Jesus' eyes, we are, John's gospel reminded us, seeing through the discerning, appreciative eyes of the Creator.

Application

John's use of the phrase "In the beginning" stretches our minds to areas of mystery of which science is just scratching the surface, even today. John didn't say the Word (Jesus) "began." He said the Word already "was" in the beginning. In other words, he was convinced that Jesus is eternal; he is God; he is Creator. In what ways does John's testimony that Jesus was more than just a good man shape your faith, and the way you live in the world he created?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, what came into being through you was life. Thank you for creating new life in me. Keep teaching me how to trust your creative power to provide what I most need in life. Amen.

Did You Know?

In response to a massive oil spill off the coast of Southern California in 1969, Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson initiated the idea of the first annual Earth Day on April 22, 1970. What began as a grass-roots movement organized and led by young activists and volunteers is now recognized as the launch of the environmental movement and observed in nearly 200 countries. Each year, Earth Day has a theme that focuses on environmental concerns. The theme for Earth Day 2024 is Planet vs. Plastics. To learn more, take quizzes, find activities, click here: [earthday.org](https://www.earthday.org)

Tuesday, April 23

Scripture: Genesis 1:26 – 2:3

Then God said, "Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth."

God created humanity in God's own image,
in the divine image God created them,
male and female God created them.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and master it. Take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, and everything crawling on the ground." Then God said, "I now give to you all the plants on the earth that yield seeds and all the trees whose fruit produces its seeds within it. These will be your food. To all wildlife, to all the birds in the sky, and to everything crawling on the ground—to everything that breathes—I give all the green grasses for food." And that's what happened. God saw everything he had made: it was supremely good. There was evening and there was morning: the sixth day.

The heavens and the earth and all who live in them were completed. On the sixth day God completed all the work that he had done, and on the seventh day God rested from all the work that he had done. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all the work of creation.

Observation

Genesis said humans are God's beloved children, created in God's image. This is clearer when we compare the Bible to creation stories from the Mesopotamian countries around Israel. In them, frightening, selfish gods fought one another, and made human beings to be their slaves. In Genesis, God created human beings in God's own image, and made them for a loving relationship!

Application

What key message(s) do you find in the poetic lines of Genesis 1:27: "So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them"? What does this tell you about yourself and your worth? If God created both male and female "in God's own image," what does that tell you about God?

Prayer

Dear God, before anything else existed, Genesis said, you were there. You set it all in motion and gave us a model of rest as well as work. Help me learn how to give up trying to control everything, and to rest in your care. Amen.

Did You Know?

France and England have issued single-use plastic bans? Click here for 30 environmental success stories from around the world: <https://onetreepanted.org/blogs/stories/good-news-2023>

Wednesday, April 24

Scripture: John 1:9-14 (*The Message*)

The Life-Light was the real thing:

Every person entering Life
he brings into Light.

He was in the world,
the world was there through him,
and yet the world didn't even notice.

He came to his own people,
but they didn't want him.

But whoever did want him,
who believed he was who he claimed
and would do what he said,

He made to be their true selves,
their child-of-God selves.

These are the God-begotten,
not blood-begotten,
not flesh-begotten,
not sex-begotten.

The Word became flesh and blood,
and moved into the neighborhood.

We saw the glory with our own eyes,
the one-of-a-kind glory,
like Father, like Son,

Generous inside and out,
true from start to finish

Observation

The Message paraphrased the powerful poetry of John 1:12 as “whoever did want him, who believed he was who he claimed and would do what he said, He made to be their true selves, their child-of-God selves.” John was convinced that in Christ we find our true identity. Jesus, who was God, “authorized us” to become God’s children. As we claim and live into that identity, we realize more and more that God is on our side, and find that as God’s children we live a life increasingly filled with grace and truth.

Application

Being born is the way each one of us begins our life in the world. John, taking his cue from Jesus (John 3:3-8), said the life Jesus brought is so qualitatively new that it’s like being born, this time as a child of God. When did your spiritual journey start? In what ways has trusting and following Jesus given you a whole new life? John also knew the sad reality that many people, then and now, refused the light Jesus brought into the world. What are some of the reasons, external or internal, that people ignore or reject Jesus’ light? What helped you to overcome those forces in your own life and welcome that life-giving light?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you wanted so urgently to reach me and give me new life that you came from the mists of eternity to live here as a human, to be a part of our history. Help me embody and share the good news of your gift of yourself to us. Amen.

Did You Know?

Plastic pollution is one of the greatest threats to ocean health worldwide. But there are many solutions to plastic pollution that you can participate in today. Three ideas: use your Messiah Reusable bag when you shop, not single use bags. Learn about how to recycle plastic containers and pouches/films. Notice how things are packaged. Could you buy the same thing in a package using less plastic? Let’s learn more about oceans and plastic:

<https://theoceancleanup.com/ocean-plastic/>

Thursday, April 25

Scripture: John 20:19-28; 1 Corinthians 15:51-58

It was still the first day of the week. That evening, while the disciples were behind closed doors because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities, Jesus came and stood among them. He said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. When the disciples saw the Lord, they were filled with joy. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.” Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven; if you don’t forgive them, they aren’t forgiven.”

Thomas, the one called Didymus, one of the Twelve, wasn’t with the disciples when Jesus came. The other disciples told him, “We’ve seen the Lord!” But he replied, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, put my finger in the wounds left by the nails, and put my hand into his side, I won’t believe.” After eight days his disciples were again in a house and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus entered and stood among them. He said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here. Look at my hands. Put your hand into my side. No more disbelief. Believe!” Thomas responded to Jesus, “My Lord and my God!”

Listen, I’m telling you a secret: All of us won’t die, but we will all be changed—in an instant, in the blink of an eye, at the final trumpet. The trumpet will blast, and the dead will be raised with bodies that won’t decay, and we will be changed. It’s necessary for this rotting body to be

clothed with what can't decay, and for the body that is dying to be clothed in what can't die. And when the rotting body has been clothed in what can't decay, and the dying body has been clothed in what can't die, then this statement in scripture will happen:

Death has been swallowed up by a victory.

Where is your victory, Death?

Where is your sting, Death?

(Death's sting is sin, and the power of sin is the Law.) Thanks be to God, who gives us this victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! As a result of all this, my loved brothers and sisters, you must stand firm, unshakable, excelling in the work of the Lord as always, because you know that your labor isn't going to be for nothing in the Lord.

Observation

Jesus' response to Thomas and his doubts showed that the risen Jesus did not discard his human body. It clearly had some new qualities, but still bore the scars of crucifixion. So, the apostle Paul didn't say in 1 Corinthians 15 that we will be "replaced." No — we will be "changed," our mortal bodies "clothed" in what can't die. Scholar N. T. Wright wrote, "Easter is the start of God's new creation.... It has already burst in. And the whole point of John 20 and 21 is that we who believe in Jesus are to become, in the power of his spirit, not only beneficiaries of that new creation but also agents."

Application

In 1 Corinthians 15 the apostle boldly proclaimed a divine victory so sweeping and comprehensive that death itself would be "swallowed up," and would be no more. But he didn't then say, "So relax and wait for the resurrection." No—he wrote, "You must stand firm, unshakable, excelling in the work of the Lord as always, because you know that your labor isn't going to be for nothing in the Lord." How can you trust that every effort to make the world more like the kingdom of God "isn't going to be for nothing"?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for winning the biggest victory of all on my behalf. Thank you for calling me to grow, stretch and become more than I am as I join in your victorious work. Amen.

Did You Know?

With skyrocketing plastic production, low levels of recycling, and poor waste management, between 4 and 12 million metric tons of plastic enter the ocean each year. Plastic pollution is one of the greatest threats to ocean health worldwide. But there are many solutions to plastic pollution that you can participate in today. We start with better recycling and trash practices. And there are some creative uses of ocean plastic happening in several industries. To learn more, click here: <https://www.caragreen.com/the-top-8-products-made-out-of-recycled-ocean-plastic/#:~:text=Ocean%20plastic%20can%20be%20processed,clothing%20made%20from%20ocean%20plastic!>

Friday, April 26, Arbor Day

Scripture: Romans 8:19-22

The whole creation waits breathless with anticipation for the revelation of God's sons and daughters. Creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice—it was the choice of the one who subjected it—but in the hope that the creation itself will be set free from slavery to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of God's children. We know that the whole creation is groaning together and suffering labor pains up until now.

Observation

For much of human history, most people thought of the earth as “a given,” assuming that the air or the rivers and lakes would remain clean no matter what we put into them. But 2000 years ago, the apostle Paul understood that not just human beings but “the whole creation” was suffering from the effects of departing from God’s path. Yet he didn’t write in despair. His phrase “breathless with anticipation” was “a dramatic image of hope.”

Application

Economic and political factors have made understanding the causes of more intense tropical storms or the disastrous wildfires in California and Australia controversial. But no matter how you understand causation, it’s hard to deny that these conditions and others fit Paul’s phrase that “the whole creation is groaning together.” How can God’s people be actively involved in relieving the suffering in our world?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, help me to care about your creation the way you do. Show me how I can better care for your world and help me encourage the people in my life to do the same. Amen.

Did You Know?

Today is Arbor Day! So, what is the difference between Arbor Day and Earth Day? Put simply, Arbor Day’s purpose is to plant more trees in the community (for all the good things they give us,) while Earth Day’s purpose is to pay attention to the condition of the environment and to raise awareness of what we can do to help. For more information on Arbor Day, click here:

<https://plantwithpurpose.org>

Saturday, April 27

Scripture: Revelation 11:15-18, 21:1-5, 22:1-3

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying,

“The kingdom of the world has become
the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ,
and he will rule forever and always.”

Then the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshipped God. They said,

“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
who is and was,
for you have taken your great power and enforced your rule.
The nations were enraged, but your wrath came.

The time came for the dead to be judged.

The time came to reward your servants, the prophets and saints,
and those who fear your name, both small and great,
and to destroy those who destroy the earth.”

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne say, “Look! God’s dwelling is here with humankind. He will dwell with them, and they will be his peoples. God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. There will be no mourning, crying, or pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” Then the one seated on the throne

said, “Look! I’m making all things new.” He also said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

Then the angel showed me the river of life-giving water, shining like crystal, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb through the middle of the city’s main street. On each side of the river is the tree of life, which produces twelve crops of fruit, bearing its fruit each month. The tree’s leaves are for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse. The throne of God and the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.

Observation

In the Biblical creation stories (Genesis 1 and 2), God made human beings stewards to care for and protect God’s good earth, not “owners” allowed to exploit and ravage the planet’s people, living creatures and resources. The seer of Revelation said the time would come when God would destroy those who wickedly destroy the earth (specifically, in his focus, the brutal Roman emperors and those who served them). But his great vision didn’t stop there—it rolled on to end in Paradise restored. With images from the prophet Isaiah as well as the Genesis creation stories, it showed the world as God meant it to be, full of harmony, beauty and well-being. In Revelation 21, “the one seated on the throne” made a resonant promise to our broken, hurting world: “I’m making all things new.”

Application

In “**Big Yellow Taxi**,” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2595abcvh2M>) Joni Mitchell’s refrain said, “Don’t it always seem to go/That you don’t know what you’ve got/Till it’s gone./They paved paradise/ And put up a parking lot.” Reflect on all of the complex social and economic choices we call “civilization.” Which parts have tended to care for and nurture creation as “God’s Garden”? Which parts have instead directly or indirectly led to “destroying the earth”? Every day natural or man-made disasters, illnesses, some large or small economic factor declining, or the world scene getting more hostile can make it feel as though the news is trying to snuff out hope. In whom do you place your confidence that “the worst thing is never the last thing”? Do you trust that Jesus meant it when he promised to make “all things new”? Can you live in hope that, in the end, God will win, restoring you and the world you live in?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I yearn for the day when you make all things new. Keep renewing me and empowering me to live and work for good with trust and hope in a world painfully short of both. Amen.

Did You Know?

Messiah Church is working toward being better stewards of Creation. As part of this, we will continue to learn how to reduce/use/recycle/reuse/repurpose. Learning how to make small changes to reduce waste is a big challenge. Click here for ideas:

<https://onetreplanted.org/blogs/stories/how-to-reduce-waste>