

Sunday, April 26, 2020

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Revelation 21:1-5

HOPE WAITS in “the Fierce Urgency of Now”

INTRODUCTION:

I came upon this quote from Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King this week and found it so provocative and meaningful, especially in light of our world today. King writes,

“We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there 'is' such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action.”

Now THAT is a call to action!

It seems as if these words he wrote 50 years ago about civil rights could have been in a *Sunday Times* op-ed this morning about the global pandemic or the devastation we call climate change. The rugged truth about our human condition seems to be quite consistent across time. Sure, things change, we progress, education, the sciences and technology allow us to know more, we live far more comfortably today and see the world more clearly with more predictability about the future. But the existential truth remains. “The fierce urgency of now” has never been a one-time thing. Since Adam and Eve took a delicious bite of that perfect fruit, we human beings have known the ongoing struggle of good and evil.

Faced with the dual demons of pandemic coupled with climate change, we also see clearly that “tomorrow is today.” In the surreal weariness and malaise of 6 or 7 weeks of quarantine and at least another month or so to go, we can lose sight of any brighter day. As the ecological systems of this fragilely balanced planet choke on our human toxicity, it is harder and harder to construct a happy ending to this story.

But we, who study Scripture and trust in a Redeeming God, already know that the ending has already been written, and as it turns out, there **is** no place like home. Like Dorothy’s grand adventure through Oz, our own cosmic journey always leads us back to the beginning. And remember, in the beginning God said, “it is good.”

Inspired by Dr. King, and because tomorrow undeniably is today, I thought it good to read from the final book of the Bible. The Book of Revelation is all about a world devolving into

terrifying chaos. The flagrant sinful hubris of humanity caves in on itself in apocalyptic horror. We read about a complete societal and environmental breakdown where destruction war, poverty and suffering are relentless. But this enigmatic vision continues on.

At the end of a twenty-chapter long horror show, there is a sudden dawn of light. This is a reboot of the Genesis story! The chaos and suffering become the vital ingredients that form the emergence of a new world, an entirely restored world is resurrected. The original blessing that was in harmony with God is reestablished and all life is liberated from the oppression and result of sin.

Hear these words of hope from the Book of Revelation, chapter 21.



SCRIPTURE: Revelation 21:1-5

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth;
for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away,
and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem,
coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
“See, the home of God is among mortals.
God will dwell with them;
they will be God’s peoples,

and God will be with them;
God 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.”
And the one who was seated on the throne said,
“See, I am making all things new.”
Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.”



God of darkness and light, you gave birth to the universe. We were conceived from the great unfathomable depths of your bottomless, mysterious love. As we now wait in the darkness of the tomb, we cling to the reassurance that your love is still at work, even

when we cannot see or comprehend. Fill us today with Divine hope in your Word and your Spirit that even now blows across the earth. AMEN

As I said earlier, this is the 50 Anniversary of Earth Day. A vast global movement was launched on that historic day that that. I'll bet some of you participated. The first Earth Day demonstrated the enormous power and strong influence of collective, non-violent action. And now, 50 years later, I think we really need to look to that and other great societal movements to help guide us toward how we might become powerful and strong agents for real change, even as the world edges closer to the brink of total inhalation, we must find ways to unite and say no, this will now stand. "This is a time for vigorous and positive action."

A month ago I wasn't sure if this is the time to engage in a climate justice Sunday. I spoke with colleagues, friends and many of you about it. And in the end, it seemed so clear to me that this global pandemic and the climate crisis are tightly intertwined.

Both have been termed "apocalyptic" and both are systematically predictable through scientifically verified evidence. And in both disaster scenarios, the only agreed upon possible solution for our survival is for **good people to organize in a collective non-violent agreement**. We must agree to live our lives differently than before. We are doing that now, around the world, to survive this pandemic. It is not easy, we are losing time, money and, for many, what was once a secure future has collapsed into complete uncertainty. But the agreement to quarantine is working! I think the solution to surviving climate change requires the same kind of dramatic, collective worldwide agreement. The difference is that COVID-19 spreads hourly. We can track the numbers in real time on our computers. Important, powerful people have become infected. We can feel the heat from the fire raging in our own back yard. However, the fierce and steady inferno of the climate catastrophe somehow does not seem as real a threat. The enormous losses don't seem to affect our day to day...yet. But the science is clear and undisputed by all the experts. Even though we've been warned for 50 years, we still have not been "confronted with the fierce urgency of now."

Today we all are getting just a taste of how billions of people around the world have been living every day for decades; worrying about how to get food, safe housing, health care and secure employment. The headlines that label this time as apocalyptic are not exaggerated! But for me, apocalyptic is a word that ignites my hope, because I know that the word "apocalypse" is synonymous with the word "revelation" and I know how that book ends!

In this extraordinary moment in time, what is being revealed is that if we are to survive, we need to change We need to repent, which means to go a different way. We

need to reorder our lives so the planet can thrive once again. We need reorder our priorities from competition to cooperation. We need to value our relationships because we are discovering how desperately we need one another. And most importantly, we need to really know deep in our heart how all life is inextricably linked. Humanity, Creation, and every molecule in the entire Cosmos are bound together as one! And this oneness spans across all space and time. This is what the poet Marie Howe calls the “singularity we once were.” In her poem *Singularity* she quotes Walt Whitman who said,

“Every atom belonging to me as good, belongs to you.”

Just this week, a friend of mine sent me an extraordinary short film she just finished. It’s an animated abstract work that visually interprets Marie Howe’s stunningly profound poem *Singularity* as she reads it for the first time to a live audience. I’d like play it for you now because to me it this little film evokes the birthplace of my hope.

(film played here)

The revelatory moment here in this apocalyptic time is that there is a cosmic and vibrant singularity at work. The singularity of our God transcends this dark night of existential uncertainty. This is a deep and sustaining hope that nourishes our weakened soul and strengthens us for the healing that will surely come.

All of Scripture, all of history, all of nature and all of our own lives reveal the same singular and perpetual cycle. Crises and chaos are always the critical ingredients necessary for the emergence of new life. Like natural child birth this is hard, agonizing work. Lives are at stake; blood is spilled and the pain feels unbearable. The emergence of new life is never comfortable or even manageable, but the hard truth is that this is the **only** way we grow. Thank God for giving us an enduring hope that somehow rises up when we see beyond the fierce urgency of now to a beautiful and extraordinary new life born on the far side of these labor pains.

God is inviting us today to push through this hard labor and know the deeper joy given by the One who assured us when he said, “See, I am making all things new.” People of God, *This is a time for vigorous and positive action.*”

AMEN!