

Traveling With The King

November 22, 2009

Richmond United Church

Twenty-Fifth Sunday After Pentecost 2009

Reign of Christ Sunday

Revelation 1:4-8

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#)

John 18:33-37

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#)

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The Rev. Dr. George Hermanson

Eric Clapton wrote a blues tune called, *Riding with the King*. He sings it with a king, B.B. King, about the king, Elvis. As the song moves deeper, riding with the king takes us to The King, to the source of our faith project. This Sunday is about riding with our King - Christ - the reign of Christ.

The rock group R.E.M. has a song called, "The end of the world as we know it." Every person, every church and every culture run into a point where they have to rethink all that they have held dear. The church is at that point, those things we took for granted no longer work. Familiar support systems are gone. It is like the song - we have come undone.

This experience has two sides to it. We can change the world for the better. We learn better ways to live together. We have a more healthy attitude about ourselves and others. We can revision what it means to be church. It means creating a new project based on hope. This is what the bible calls an eschatological experience. It is the ability to see the light breaking through the cracks in everything. It is a profound sense that all is well with the world.

There is the opposite experience - the apocalyptic experience. It is often referred to as the end times, or the end of all time. It is a radical break from what is, into nothing. The current movie 2012 is about such a view.

In the age of terrorism, running out of oil, and global warming we are tempted by the theologies that picture the end of history - the destruction of the world. Or in the face of the realities of our time, some are tempted to deny the fact we live in dangerous times. Others offer a false optimism that refuses to look at our reality and suggests that if we just work harder, think harder, our problems will go away.

The end of the world stories come out of an experience where the world looks so evil it is better to destroy it. It comes out of a theology that is world denying, and suggests that only heaven is to be desired, at the expense of the here and now. This version is not a biblical idea, for it reverses the biblical image of heaven coming into time, to redeem this time and space, to restore us to an original blessing.

The basic spiritual question is the God / world relationship. We know what is, will end, our story has an ending. Where in this continuing perishing is God?

When we read Revelation out of the vision of eschatology, that heaven is to be experienced on earth and that all of time and space is within the care of God then changing times are times of opportunity for novel reality.

Revelation affirms that God is the constant in the changing reality. God who is, is all in all. This is the meaning of the Greek - alpha and omega - the one who is the power of love from the beginning to the end. In other words, God holds all things together - now and forever.

The Christian faith can give us the power to look realistic at the events of our time. It does not deny that we are lovers in dangerous times. It tells us that our project is to be lovers in dangerous times.

Barbara Rossing has written a book called, *The Rapture Exposed: the Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation*. She suggests the New Jerusalem that is coming is not a vision of heaven. Rather it is a vision of God coming down to earth. The ever lasting love of God frees us to make our life project one that affirms the care of earth and people. Over against all who want to escape from reality, be it shopping, and other escapisms like a religious violent end of history, we have in Revelation an affirmation that we can face our issues and together come up with solutions.

When we read Revelation in its context, we find a vision of hope. It was written in a time where the street lights of the time were martyrs being burnt at the stake. The Roman Empire had done its worst to those it who disagreed with it. Its Imperial rule is found in the action's of Caesar Augustus when he decreed the whole world was to be enrolled in a census. Rome had laid claim to the whole earth - oikoumene- "imperial world." It was dangerous for those who opposed the placing of Rome in the role of God. Thus, the early church suffered and was tempted to give up.

Revelation is written to encourage the church, to remind them that despite the evidence God was in control - God is the king. Rather than end times of destruction, what Revelation does is speak of hope.

Faith has the power of pulling back a curtain, to expose something, showing the difference between illusion and reality. It is to pull back the veil and to show something we hadn't been able to see.

Even though God is in every moment and is ever lasting, that does not mean we cannot destroy the world. It is not what God wants, yet we have the power to make life unsustainable. Given that, it is helpful to parse the images of destruction. God is not in the business of destroying this earth. When we read Revelations carefully we find that it reads - "I am going to destroy the destroyers of the earth." God created the earth and loves it, but what is at issue are those attitudes and actions that will destroy our ecosystem. It is those things that have to end.

We face many false prophets. Abundant life is not about more toys, more and more stuff, it is about riding with the king. It is the power of a King who uses persuasive love to lure us into more wholeness. It is a call to us to use the power of love, nonviolent love to change the world. This means risking. It means challenging sacred cows. It means that a church can transform its belief systems.

We can pull back the veil of illusions that surround us and live boldly for this earth we love. We may say this is the end of the world as we know it. For we can look beyond way have done things and insist that we are called, as God's people, never to give up on earth. New ways of being can burst forth. God is never going to give up and neither can we.

Riding with the King, takes us to the King, to the source of our project. We are to sing our way through the dark times, because there is singer who was there from the beginning and is there with us to the end. When we ride with the King we face the world with hope, with realism and know that we are called to be the witnesses to a constructive re imaging of a sustainable society, to constructing a new way of being church. It is hard work and we have the foundation for that work because we are surrounded by God, redeemed by God and sustained by God. We can face end of the world as it is, and riding with the King we help new life blossom.

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