

FIRST LESSON: Isaiah 65: 17-19  
SECOND LESSON: Revelation 21:1-6  
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### ***“I Make All Things New”***

Sermon © Lisa C. Farrell

When I was a little girl in first grade I brought a very special item to school for show and tell. It was a piggy bank –a pig holding a tennis racket. It was very special to me because my dad had given it to me. He was the tennis player in the family. But when I was running down the hall I tripped and fell. The piggy bank came out of my hands and broken into what looked like a thousand pieces. I cried and cried. The very kind janitor swept it up and my teacher Miss Quinn tried to comfort me. It was a Friday. I went home that day very sad. My parents didn't seem to think it was a big deal, but to me it was. On Monday morning when I returned to school, there was a surprise waiting for me. That incredibly kind janitor whose name I do not even remember had spent the entire weekend gluing my piggy bank back together, piece by piece. I really wish I still had it. I have no idea what happened to it. My restored piggy bank was worth more to me after it was repaired than it was before it was broken. I could see the cracks, but now I could also see the love and patience of this man who made it new. He took the time to do that for a six-year-old, a six-year-old who has never forgotten.

What does it mean to make all things new? When God makes things new in our lives God doesn't roll back time. It is not as if we never suffered. Our suffering brings with it hard earned wisdom. The difficult and painful times in our lives give us depth and maturity. To be whole does not mean to go backward. It means to go forward, and not worry about the cracks showing.

I don't often preach on the book of Revelation, although I did do an entire series once. My point then and now is this: Revelation is not meant to be taken literally. This is not a roadmap to the end times. While often written in code, it is not a code for us. Revelation is an example of a specific genre of literature called apocalyptic, like biography, or mystery or poetry. There were other apocalyptic writings at the time. This one just happened to make it into the bible, and I might add, by the skin of its teeth.

Every image presented in Revelation is just that—an image. It is a poetic way of describing current events so well disguised that the authorities couldn't turn up and arrest the author. The number 666, for example, probably means Nero. Letters were used as numbers back then, providing a very convenient way of creating a code. The letter iota is number one. Pente is number five. Dekka is number ten. We have imported a lot of these meanings into the English language. There were letters for the numbers 1-10 and letters meaning

hundreds and thousands etc. This is not really relevant to the sermon this morning, except to reassure you not to get spooked by the number 666.

The author of Revelation was likely someone named John the elder, not one of the apostles. He wrote, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. The “heaven” he was talking about here are the “heavens” or sky. To say “the heavens and the earth” was a way of referring to all of creation. Those who love the beach need not panic about there being no sea, however. The children of Israel were not a seafaring race. Their fishermen stayed close to home. The sea represented danger and attack from foreign nations. “No more sea” meant “no more attacks.”

The imagery of a new heaven and a new earth comes straight from Isaiah. “See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.” Isaiah too promises a time where tears will be no more and Jerusalem will be a delight to all. Isaiah’s promises, however, were made originally to the children of Israel. The promises found in Revelation are to all who believe. In Isaiah’s time the Jews were in exile and in despair. This was a promise of return and healing. Jerusalem had been destroyed and it would be rebuilt. The vision in Revelation also involves a return—but it is the return of Christ.

In Revelation it is not the old Jerusalem that will be rebuilt, but a new Jerusalem from heaven, because God will dwell directly with God’s people. And before we get carried away expecting a city to come floating down out of the clouds, there is no literal city going to land on our heads. The city represents all of humanity, and the point here is that when Christ returns God will live with us. The barrier of sin and evil will be gone. And that is mind blowing, because we have never lived in any other kind of world. Imagine a world without lying politicians? Imagine a world without dictators starting wars? Imagine a world where corporate greed doesn’t destroy the planet? Imagine a world full of love, not hate?

God will dwell with us and heal the world. There will be no more tears, no more death or mourning, no crying or pain. God will wipe away our tears, not just those on that day but God will heal the pain in us of every tear we have ever cried. The chain reaction where hurt people hurt people will end. Damaged relationships and damaged people will be mended. Salvation is not just an individual reality, it is a communal reality, which is why we are given the image of a city. The new Jerusalem is an allegory for a deeper spiritual reality.

Some denominations are obsessed with the end times. Presbyterians . . . not so much. We tend to focus on here and now issues, and if we consider what comes next, it’s usually as individuals who die and go to be with God. We don’t think too much about God’s ultimate goal of healing the world. We probably should consider it more, but we don’t. Part of this is due to the fact that it involves a lot of speculation. What we have in scripture are images and allegories. No one really knows what it will be like. I remember once hearing a pastor an independent church called Calvary Chapel give an incredibly detailed accounting of what everything will look like down to the last detail. He was using the book of Revelation and interpreting it literally. But Revelation was

never meant to be interpreted literally. Literalism can really make us miss the point entirely. Think of it like the wife who asked her husband, “Could you please go shopping for me and buy one carton of milk, and if they have eggs, get 6.” A short time later when he returned with 6 cartons of milk she just shook her head and asked him, “Why on earth did you buy 6 cartons of milk?”

He replied, “They had eggs.”

Taking Revelation literally makes about that much sense.

We don’t understand what our resurrection bodies will be like, only that they will be different. The imagery that the apostle Paul gives us is that of a seed that is transformed into a beautiful plant. An apple seed does not resemble an apple tree. Resurrection is about continuity and discontinuity. I will still exist as myself, but at the same time I will be totally different. The same is true for what our world will be like when Christ comes again. The world will be remade. It will be the same, and totally different. But the good news is the process of making new begins now, even as we are still part of a broken world. God does not abandon creation or us, but is constantly working. We may have been broken by life, but carefully and patiently God will put us back together, and if the cracks show, they are only there to show us how much we are loved. Amen.

Isaiah 65: 17-19

**17** “See, I will create

new heavens and a new earth.

The former things will not be remembered,  
nor will they come to mind.

**18** But be glad and rejoice forever

in what I will create,

for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight  
and its people a joy.

**19** I will rejoice over Jerusalem

and take delight in my people;

the sound of weeping and of crying  
will be heard in it no more.

Revelation 21:1-6

**21** Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. **2** I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. **3** And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. **4** ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

**5** He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

<sup>6</sup> He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.