

Text: Revelation 21:1-7, Ephesians 1:1-4,15-22 (secondary text)  
Sermon Title: *To the Saints at Hyde Park Mennonite Fellowship*

Revelation 21:1-7

Then I saw new heavens and a new earth. The former heavens and the former earth had passed away, and the sea existed no longer. I also saw a new Jerusalem, the holy city, coming down out of heaven from God, beautiful bride and groom on their wedding day.

And I heard a loud voice calling from the throne, “Look! God’s Tabernacle is among humankind! God will live with them; they will be God’s people, and God will be fully present among them. The Most High will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And death, mourning, crying and pain will be no more, for the old order has fallen.”

The One who sat on the throne said, “Look! I’m making all things new!” and added, “Write this, for what I am saying is trustworthy and true.”

And that One continued, “It is finished. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To those who are thirsty I will give drink freely from the spring of the water of life.

Ephesians 1:1-4,15-22

From Paul, an Apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the holy ones of Ephesus who are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace and peace to you from God our Creator and from our Savior Jesus Christ.

Praised be the Maker of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has bestowed on us in Christ every spiritual blessing in the heavens! Before the world began, God chose us in Christ to be holy and blameless and to be full of love.

From the time I first heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all of the holy ones, I have never stopped thanking God for you and remembering you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Savior Jesus Christ, the God of glory, will give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation, to bring you to a rich knowledge of the Creator.

I pray that God will enlighten the eyes of your mind so that you can see the hope this call holds for you – the promised glories that God’s holy ones will inherit, and the infinitely great power that is exercised for us who believe. You can tell this from the strength of God’s power at work in Jesus, the power used to raise Christ from the dead and to seat Christ in heaven at God’s right hand, far above every sovereignty, authority, power or dominion, and above any other name that can be named – not only in this age, but also in the age to come.

It has been a long week – a wedding yesterday and a few evening meetings. Friday afternoon, after a few hours at Corpus Christi House and some epic Ping-Pong matches with Pat Casey, I came back to my office to read for my sermon. And as I was reading from my new book of *The Collected Sermons of Walter Brueggemann*, volume 2, I started to nod off. So, I went down and brewed myself a little batch of coffee and did some push-ups to get the blood pumping.

I returned to my office, mug of coffee in hand, arms slightly fatigued from push-ups – and soon, a chapter into *The Believer’s Church Commentary on Revelation*, my eyes began to dim and I started having the “church jerks”, you know the kind, when your head starts to bob and you jerk it up. This continued until I finally lay my head upon my desk. And while sleeping there, I had a dream:

I was still in my office, but suddenly everything was hazy, like being in a great fog – there was a knock at my office door – I arose from my chair and through the haze, found the door handle and opened it. There a figure stood before me, a figure that appeared to be human, but through the fog I could not see the entire outline of their body. As I opened the door I could feel a rush of warm air sweep into the room, and there was a pleasant smell, almost like the aroma of fresh honey. They wore an odd outfit that resembled a choir robe of deep purple, similar to the color of my shirt here. The figure stepped, or perhaps floated (I cannot be sure) into my office. They did not say anything, only handed me a flash drive. And then, after stopping and smiling at the dashboard Jesus which sits on one of my bookshelves, they left – as they left the warmth of the room departed, but that sweet aroma lingered.

I sat back down and inserted the flash drive into my computer. There was only one file on it, a Word document upon entitled “To HPMF.” I clicked on the icon and it opened a letter, at the top left-hand corner it was dated October 23, 2016, and this is what it said:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, *To All the Saints at Hyde Park Mennonite Fellowship who are faithful in Christ Jesus:*

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator and the Lord Jesus Christ. Praised be the Maker of the heavens and the earth, who has bestowed on us in Christ every spiritual blessing in the heavens! Before the world began, God chose you to be a special and holy people – a people full of love.

I have heard of your faith, of your acts of justice and kindness, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that God will continue to open wide your eyes so that you may see the power of the calling that God has placed upon this community, a calling to be a people of healing and hope for the world.

I have seen from afar of your work there in Boise, of the ways that you have sought to support those without homes in your community – how you have supported, with your time and your finances, those who have no place to call home.

I have heard of your great care and concern for the beautiful earth that our God has created and placed you in – the ways you love to dwell in that creation, on rivers and in bicycles, on walks through your Boise foothills and mountains. You have been moved by the beauty of God’s handiwork – you have seen the value of each living thing which God has created, the sacredness of each life.

I have heard of the ways that you have tried to stand-up for the lives of the vulnerable in your city and in our world. The ways you have stood for those not concerned citizens of your nation, the ways you have sought to support health-care for ones who cannot pay to see a doctor, and how you have sought to amplify the voices of LGBT people who still lack basic rights in the place where you live. I have seen the comforters that are assembled here on Wednesdays to be sent to refugees around the world as a symbol of God's comfort for those in crisis. And, I have heard of the ways you have sought to support Albino children half-way around your planet, seeking to support them in their education and protection. And, I have learned of your efforts far and locally, in seeking to be vessels of God's healing for those who have experienced the trauma associated with violence and war.

For all these efforts and more, I give thanks daily for you and the ways you seek to be vessels of healing and hope to the world – for the ways you seek to bear of the image of Christ, showing glimpses of God's great love here on earth.

Sisters and brothers, as you continue to attend to the important work which God has called you to, I urge you, do not neglect your own intimate relationship with your Creator. To use a metaphor that might connect with you, the spiritual life is a great bicycle wheel, many small spokes keeping the wheel spinning true and forward. Each spoke plays an important role in the trueness of the wheel. And so, do not forget to tighten the spokes of prayer and silence – of listening to the Spirit of God which is always on the move. Do not neglect to the spokes of observing the world with openness, making space for the great Spirit of God to disturb you and trouble you; making space for that same Spirit to offer you comfort and peace. While you attend

to the spokes of justice and peace in the world, do not neglect to tighten the practices which uphold you in these efforts: of silence, prayer, meditation, communing with the natural world.

Do not forget to tighten the spoke of spending time in community, in sharing your lives together over food and laughter. Remember that our God is a God of community: Creator, Christ, and Sustainer. Just as our God is in relationship, so you have been called into relationship. And so as your culture continues to be warped by the high value of the individual, forget not the importance of being together in community with other saints to uphold you.

And do not neglect the spoke of reading the scriptures. While it is an ancient and mysterious text, it is a beautiful book which offers to us the best picture we have of our Lord Jesus Christ and the God who called him to come and walk among us. While other study and readings are important, do not neglect the spiritual food of the holy scriptures which continues to speak with clarity in your time and in your world – it continues to remind us that, no matter what chaos this world will bring, God continues to say in these stories that, “I will be your God and you will be my people.” And so, sisters and brothers, do not forget the foundational spoke which you have come to know as the “Holy Bible.”

Hyde Parkers, when you feel a fear building in you over the future of the Christian church or your particular community of faith, remember that God does not fear. The church of Jesus Christ has continued to shift and change since the days I first penned my letters to those in Corinth and Ephesus. The church has made small changes and major changes – those who have sought to be faithful to the Christ they met in scripture have often lead the church in new directions for their time and their world. This will continue to happen until the earth passes

away. You are living in a time of great spiritual and cultural upheaval, when many of the ways of the past are being reexamined and sifted through. Do not be afraid. Fresh expressions of the Christian faith are emerging from these shifts and changes. Christians in your country are moving away from an expectation that your government will legislate faith and beginning to recognize that they must live the faith as individuals in community; that they will be at odds with the government much of the time. It is quite possible that the denominations you have separated yourselves into these past 500 years will soon pass away. It is possible that the categories you have created to separate the body of Christ will pass away. Do not be afraid. Continue to be faithful to your calling. Remember that humanity has sought to sort and separate itself from the beginning of human history. And the Maker of the Universe has continued to breathe a Spirit of power to knock down those walls that divide and separate us.

Remember, that during my time on earth the great dividing wall was “Jew and Gentile.” The love of God in Christ knocked down that wall. But, this did not stop the next humans from erecting new walls in its place: Christian and pagan; Christian and Jew; Christian and Muslim; White and Black; Male and Female; rich and poor; citizen and undocumented; American and refugee; Gay and straight; Protestant and Catholic; Mennonite and Lutheran; Liberal and Conservative; Republican and Democrat.

Each time you think you have a category settled, God interrupts human categories once again – the Spirit continues to chip away at the walls we humans have built to separate ourselves – the Spirit who keeps reaching out beyond settled categories of who is in and who is out, who is loved and who is beyond redemption. So we have on our hands a living God who comes in visions and dreams and in many ways to shatter our settlements that are so convenient for us and

so precious for us. A living God who is always disturbing and disrupting these categories of difference that we saw as so valuable.

And so, if your denominations pass away, do not be afraid. If the ways that you gather to praise and worship the Maker change, be not afraid; if your forms of prayer and faithfulness feel new and awkward, have faith; if the ways you live out your calling as followers of Christ look different than the lives of your parents and Grandparents, remember that we serve the God who continually makes all things new.

Above all sisters and brothers, attend to the calling which God has laid before you. Do not be conformed to the culture of your time and your place, but be people who are maladjusted to the hurt and chaos of your day. Be maladjusted to the poverty which crushes the spirit of so many; be maladjusted to the powers of bombs, of drones, and the peace which comes the barrel of a gun; be maladjusted to the numbers of your citizens who sit in jail cells; be maladjusted to the numbers of men who continue to abuse their wives and girlfriends; be maladjusted to children who go to bed hungry and leave their home without a coat to cover their bodies; be maladjusted to those who use the name of our God to promote fear, hatred and exclusion; be maladjusted to a fifty, sixty and eighty-hour work weeks; be maladjusted to a sense that being busy gives you worth; be maladjusted to the amount of wealth you have as people who live in the global north; be maladjusted to the millions of people who once had a home but are now known to the world only as “refugee”. Instead, conform yourselves to the ways of Christ Jesus. Be influenced by the lives of the saints, and do not dismiss those who seek to live out fresh expressions of their faith.

And now sisters and brothers, I must close my letter, I have heard that your attention spans are not as long as they were back in the days that I walked the earth and spent long nights writing by oil lamp.

Menno sends his greetings, as does Conrad Grebel who urges you to be unafraid in your faithful living. Our sister Rosa Parks sends her blessing and asks me to remind you that the future will be what you make of it.

Give my greetings to the sisters and brothers of Evergreen Heights and Emmaus Christian Fellowship. And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in their congregations as well. And say to one old and young among you, “see that you complete the task that you have received from God.”

Peace be to the whole community at Hyde Park Mennonite Fellowship and love with faith, from God our Maker and the Lord Jesus Christ. Let the Spirit of God continue to move in you, through you and with you, forming you into God’s people. Grace be with all who have an undying love for the God we meet in Jesus Christ.

And when I finished reading the letter, I awoke suddenly and lifted my head from my desk. My office was clear, no haze or smoke to be seen, and yet, I thought I still noticed a faint sweet smell. I looked at my computer, but it was closed – no screen shining brightly, no flash



drive sticking out of any of the USB ports. I was left to conclude that it was only a dream. And as I started to rise from my seat, I heard a voice inside of my saying, “write what you have dreamt, for these words are trustworthy and true.” And then it said within me, “See, I am making all things new.”

### ***Sending Blessing***

*And now as you go from this place, may the God of yesterday, today and always go with you – giving you eyes to see a glimpse of the future as God sees; emboldening you to know that you can help create such a future – that healing and hope might flow through us and into the world. Go in peace. Amen.*