



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094

(920)261-2570

A Stephen Ministry Congregation

www.goodshepherdwi.org

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

June 2, 2019

“Behold, I am Making All Things New”

(Revelation 21:1-5)

Rev. David K. Groth

“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, 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, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. And he who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’” (Rev. 21:1-5).

Collect: O King of glory, Lord of hosts, uplifted in triumph far above all heavens, leave us not without consolation but send us the Spirit of truth whom You promised from the Father; for You live and reign with Him and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

I've been watching a television series from the UK entitled, "Escape to the Chateau." It's about a British couple that purchased an 18th century chateau in France. The chateau is massive, a 45 bedroom behemoth, with parts dating back to the 12th century. It has slate roofs, turrets, and a great big mote. It's run down and uninhabitable, no working heat or electricity or plumbing, piles of dead flies, one room taken over by bats, doors and windows that don't fully close. The gardens and orchards returned to the wild decades ago. The chateau itself has good bones and crazy good potential, but literally, every square inch of it needs attention. Every square inch of it needs renovation. The couple is trying to turn the place into their home, and a B&B, and a venue for weddings and culinary weekends and other gatherings. However, they have little money. Most of the work they'll have to do on their own. The husband is very practical, all about function; the wife is all about design. Most of the time they complement one another; some of the time they butt heads. And that's the show. But it has me hook, line and sinker. Somehow it's very satisfying in a vicarious way to see this beautiful, beautiful old chateau come back to life and show off its former glory and be made new and useful again.

In our text, that's happening on a grand scale. Our text speaks not just of a chateau, but the entire universe being renovated and restored, made beautiful and showing off its former glory.

Let's see how it comes about. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth not because he had to, but because he loves to create. For example, do you know that there are over 12,000 different species of ants on earth? Any God who creates over 12,000 different species of ants loves to create! Take a look around the world. Clearly, we have a God who loves physical matter, and color and form and function and

variety. And of all the billions of galaxies out there, and of all the solar systems in those galaxies, and of all the planets orbiting around a star, the only planet we know of that God has lavished his creative, life-giving attention on is this little one called earth. There may be more, but we don't know of any.

Because he loves his creation, he also created man, the pinnacle of his creative work, to look after his creation and help it flourish as he intends. So we are not a “weed species” on earth, as we've been called, or “earth's worst pest.” That's not God's view of mankind, not then, not now. We are the pinnacle of his creative work, made in his own image.

God breathed the breath of life into Adam and Eve, and gave them the task to work the garden and keep it, which means to help it flourish. But then, the serpent beguiles Adam and Eve, and tells them if they want, they can become like God too. And they actually make a run at it. Trying to become like God they rebel against God. Of course it doesn't work, but what does happen is all creation becomes unglued. Now there's hostility between humans, between animals, between humans and animals, between humans and God. As man's sin and wickedness increase, death and decay in creation increase.

Knowing man will never be able to save himself much less His creation, God has a plan to save us and His creation. It requires God himself to take on all it means to be human, except for sin. Do you see the irony? For all human history we've been trying to become like God. But to save us, God becomes like us, as one of us. We've been trying to become rich, but to save us, Jesus becomes poor. We've been trying to become all-powerful, but to save us, Jesus becomes weak and vulnerable. We've been trying to become immortal, but to save us, Jesus takes on our sin and suffers the wages of sin, dying on the cross.

All the while as Jesus walks the earth, he affirms the goodness of creation, beginning with his incarnation. Flesh must be good if the Lord God became it! There's nothing wrong with having flesh. Jesus shows us what man is

supposed to look like, without the sin. And he never talks about the soul being trapped within a body and how wonderful it will be once we die and the soul is finally freed from its fleshy prison. No, that's not the way God thinks. Rather, Jesus talks about the ultimate goal being *resurrection* of the flesh, not its burial, but its renewal! He teaches that though our bodies will die, yet they shall be made alive again, restored, transformed, made useful, and never to die again. No one else thought like this. No one in the era of Jesus thought of the physical world as good. For much of the world then and now, the goal is to climb some kind of ladder up to God and get away from the messiness of flesh and matter, get away from the physicality and dirtiness of earth. But that's not the way Jesus lived or talked. As God's Son on earth, he doesn't shrink from the physical. He doesn't meditate himself into another spiritual realm or reality.

Remember, he was a carpenter. Let the philosophers argue about ideas; God's Son was happy to play and work with wood and nails and tools. I suspect he built new homes, but probably renovated old homes too, made them like new, because that was, in a way, restoring God's creation, undoing the effects of the fall. So, in his formal ministry, he restores creation in a different way by healing the sick, raising the dead, feeding the hungry.

But Jesus doesn't want to heal just a few 1st century Galileans. He wants to restore us in such a way that sickness will be impossible. He doesn't want to raise just Jairus from the dead, only for him to die again. He wants to renovate the world in such a way that all are raised from the dead, and where death is impossible, in fact, unthinkable. He doesn't want to give a little food so that a few thousand people don't go home hungry on one day, only to face hunger again the next. No, he wants to restore the creation and renew it so that it freely gives its bounty, like it did in Eden.

And the path for this transformation requires sacrifice and work, not ours, but his on the cross. He didn't look

forward to that death as the ultimate release of his spirit. No he prayed fervently to be spared from it. *We* think of death as natural, but it's not. It's an unwelcome, alien invasion into God's good creation. It's the wages of sin. And for God's Son, holy, without sin, there's nothing more unnatural than death. Yet for you and for me and for all creation he dies; he dies with our sin on his back to redeem his whole creation.

Have you ever noticed that whenever God judges, he judges through creation? In Genesis 3, the creation becomes unglued. Bread only comes by the sweat of the brow. Later, as wickedness increases, he wipes most of it out with the flood. Then the plagues in Egypt, darkness at the cross, and so on.

When God saves, he uses creation there too. He uses the blood of a spotless lamb at Passover. He splits the Red Sea. He sends manna and quail. He provides water from the rock. Then, of course, the living waters of baptism, and wheat and grapes in the Lord's Supper.

That is, all creation is caught up in salvation history. Paul writes, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning with labor pains . . . and we ourselves groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for . . . the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8:22).

As we wait, he sends us out into creation to care for his creation through our vocations. That is, we get to participate in God's creative work of bringing health to the sick, building homes for people to live in, fixing that which is broken, bringing order to the disordered. Maybe that's why I like watching *Escape to the Chateau*: a small part of creation is being made beautiful again, and useful again. So also, as we serve others through our vocations, we are taking care of his creation, being stewards of his creation.

Now, we cannot prevent people from dying. But we can take good care of them while they die, out of love for them and respect for their Creator. And we know they will be raised again in the flesh.

Similarly, this earth is dying; it will pass away. It

will wear out like a garment says the Lord in Isaiah We cannot save it. But we can care for it, out of love for it and respect for its creator. We also know this earth, like our bodies, will also one day be recreated, made new and glorious again, never again to be run down by sin. “Behold, I am making all things new” the Lord says in our text.

This means as Christians we too should be concerned about the big things like global warming and disappearing species, but also the little things like letting your car needlessly idle while you wait in the parking lot, or letting the fruit and vegetables in your frig go bad. We cannot save the planet, only God can. But we can take much better care of it than we do. And all the while, we remember when the Lord returns he will recreate us so we can live in and enjoy the new earth.

What will it look like? Often we think of heaven as a cloudy place, ethereal, airy and intangible, mostly empty, a never ending worship service. But that doesn't sound like any fun at all, and moreover, that doesn't sound like God having any fun. Remember, we have a God who loves to create! We have a God who made over 12,000 species of ants. He delights in matter, in physical stuff, and in life. Let the philosophers argue about ideas, Jesus, the Carpenter, says, “In my Father's house are many rooms. I am going there to prepare a place for you” a physical place. Heaven only knows what our creator is dreaming up.

Finally, notice the movement of the text. It is not up, up and away to heaven, our spirits finally being freed from the flesh. But the movement in Scripture is of God coming down to earth. “And I saw the new Jerusalem (that is, the people of God) coming down out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.’”

God doesn't save us by plucking us off this earth. He rescues us always by coming down to earth: in his Son Jesus, in his Word, in the waters of baptism, in bread and

wine. It's always a downward motion. And so also on that day, the Day of the Lord, it's a downward motion when he returns to restore, refine, transform us to be the creatures he intended us to be. No more sin, therefore no more death or mourning or crying or pain. No more tears.

As Christians we look forward to being with Jesus at rest. That's good, but that's just the appetizer. The main course is being raised from the dead. The main course is having our bodies restored, renovated, made new, transformed, to enjoy the new earth that has been restored, renovated made new. We will be in the flesh, and we will see Jesus in the flesh, face to face, new earth, new soil, new air, new trees, new creation.

“Behold, I am making all things new!” Thanks be to God. Amen.

