

**Revelation 21:1-6**

**December 31, '17**

**“NEW YEAR’S REVOLUTIONS”**

**ALL FAMILIES HAVE TRADITIONS – ESPECIALLY  
HOLIDAY TRADITIONS – THOSE THINGS THAT MAKE  
THE HOLIDAY FEEL MORE SPECIAL – THINGS  
WITHOUT WHICH IT JUST WOULDN’T FEEL RIGHT.**

**ONE OF THE CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS OF OUR  
FAMILY THAT HAS HELD TRUE FOR MORE THAN 20  
YEARS IS FOR ME TO SAY THAT IT JUST DOESN’T FEEL  
LIKE CHRISTMAS UNTIL I HEAR SOMEONE SAY, “*IT  
JUST DOESN’T FEEL LIKE CHRISTMAS THIS YEAR.*”**

**ONCE I’VE HEARD THAT, I’M FINALLY ABLE TO BE  
IN A FESTIVE MOOD FOR THE HOLIDAY.**

**THIS YEAR, I CAME PRECARIOUSLY CLOSE TO  
MISSING OUT ON THAT FESTIVE MOOD – UNTIL  
CHRISTMAS EVE.**

**I RECEIVED A TEXT FROM OUR SON, DREW.**

**IT CONTAINED NINE WORDS – WORDS THAT TOLD ME DREW REMEMBERED OUR TRADITION & WAS SOMEHOW AWARE OF MY PREDICAMENT.**

**THE TEXT READ, “*DAD, IT JUST DOESN’T FEEL LIKE CHRISTMAS THIS YEAR.*”**

**WHEW! THAT WAS MID-AFTERNOON ON CHRISTMAS EVE!**

**TO BE HONEST, THOUGH, THIS YEAR REALLY *DIDN’T* FEEL LIKE CHRISTMAS – OR, AT LEAST, IT SEEMED LIKE AN ODD CHRISTMAS.**

**CHRISTMAS FALLING ON MONDAY SEEMED EVEN ODDER THAN LAST YEAR WHEN IT FELL ON SUNDAY.**

**SO, TOO, FOR NEW YEAR’S DAY.**

**NEW YEAR'S DAY ON MONDAY AND, THEREFORE,  
NEW YEAR'S EVE ON SUNDAY JUST SEEMS RATHER  
STRANGE.**

**PERHAPS I FEEL THAT WAY BECAUSE OF WHAT IT  
DOES TO THE CHURCH CALENDAR.**

**THIS IS REALLY THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER  
CHRISTMAS AND THE LECTIONARY GOSPEL READING  
FOR TODAY IS THE STORY OF THE PRESENTATION OF  
JESUS IN THE TEMPLE & THE RESPONSE OF TWO  
INDIVIDUALS – SIMEON & ANNA – WHO RECOGNIZE  
THE INCREDIBLE NATURE OF THE CHILD BEING  
BROUGHT BY MARY & JOSEPH.**

**THE DAY OF EPIPHANY – OUR TRADITIONAL TIME  
TO FOCUS ON THE VISIT OF THE WISE MEN – WILL BE  
THIS SATURDAY, JANUARY 6.**

**BUT THEN, NEXT SUNDAY IS THE DAY THAT IS SET  
ASIDE AS BAPTISM OF THE LORD SUNDAY, SO WE  
DON'T REALLY HAVE AN EPIPHANY SUNDAY.**

**BUT, AS STRANGE AS IT ALL SEEMS, THIS YEAR'S  
CALENDAR PRESENTS US WITH AN OPPORTUNITY  
THAT WE DON'T USUALLY HAVE.**

**ORDINARILY, WE ARE HERE ON A SUNDAY THAT  
FALLS A FEW DAYS BEFORE OR A FEW DAYS AFTER  
THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW YEAR.**

**IT SOMETIMES FEELS EITHER TOO EARLY OR TOO  
LATE TO FOCUS ON WHAT WE TRADITIONALLY LABEL  
“NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTIONS.”**

**NOT THIS YEAR.**

**THIS YEAR, THIS DAY – WE FIND OURSELVES  
RIGHT ON THE CUSP OF IT.**

**TOMORROW IS THE BEGINNING OF A BRAND NEW MONTH & A BRAND NEW YEAR.**

**ONE OF THE SUGGESTED READINGS FOR NEW YEAR'S EVE IS THE PASSAGE WE'VE READ THIS MORNING FROM THE BOOK OF REVELATION.**

**THAT'S WHERE I'D LIKE US TO FOCUS THIS MORNING, INSTEAD OF THE STORY OF SIMEON AND ANNA OR THE STORY OF THE VISIT OF THE WISE MEN.**

**THIS IS A PASSAGE THAT SPEAKS CLEARLY ABOUT NEW THINGS.**

**IT'S A PASSAGE THAT IS ONE OF THE MOST WELL-KNOWN PASSAGES IN THE ENTIRE BOOK OF REVELATION.**

**AND WHILE IT MAY BE WELL-KNOWN, I DON'T THINK IT IS WELL-UNDERSTOOD.**

**THIS PASSAGE REALLY FLIES IN THE FACE OF THINGS WE TRADITIONALLY HAVE COME TO BELIEVE.**

**IN LOOKING AT THESE WORDS OF JOHN IN REVELATION, I THINK THEY OFFER US PROFOUND GUIDELINES FOR – NOT NEW YEAR’S *RESOLUTIONS* – BUT RATHER NEW YEAR’S *REVOLUTIONS*.**

**THEY ARE, INDEED, REVOLUTIONARY WORDS THAT JOHN SPEAKS.**

**MORE PRECISELY, THEY ARE REVOLUTIONARY WORDS THAT *GOD* SPEAKS BECAUSE, UNLIKE MOST OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION, THESE AREN’T JOHN’S WORDS BUT GOD’S.**

**WHAT GOD SAYS HERE THAT IS SO INCREDIBLY REVOLUTIONARY – WHAT GOD TELLS US IN THIS PASSAGE THAT FLIES AGAINST EVERYTHING WE’VE**

**COME TO BELIEVE – IS THAT HEAVEN IS GOING TO  
COME TO US INSTEAD OF US GOING TO HEAVEN.**

**TELL ME THAT’S NOT A REVOLUTIONARY  
THOUGHT!**

**BUT IT’S RIGHT THERE IN THESE WORDS WE’VE  
READ THIS MORNING!**

**FIRST, WE HAVE JOHN SETTING THE STAGE.**

**HE SAYS, “*THEN I SAW A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW  
EARTH...AND I SAW THE HOLY CITY...COMING DOWN  
OUT OF HEAVEN...*”**

**AND THEN, TO CONFIRM WHAT JOHN HAS SAID,  
WE HEAR A VOICE FROM THE THRONE SAY, “*SEE, THE  
HOME OF GOD IS AMONG MORTALS. HE WILL DWELL  
WITH THEM AS THEIR GOD...*”**

**CONTRARY TO POPULAR APOCALYPTIC  
THINKING, THERE IS NO RAPTURE – NO CHRISTIANS**

**BEING SNATCHED FROM EARTH & TRANSPORTED TO HEAVEN.**

**INSTEAD, IT IS GOD WHO IS “RAPTURED” DOWN TO EARTH TO TAKE UP RESIDENCE AMONG US!**

**THAT UNDERSTANDING MAKES THIS AN EXTRAORDINARILY APPROPRIATE PASSAGE FOR THE SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.**

**GOD COMING TO EARTH TO TAKE UP RESIDENCE AMONG US IS PRECISELY WHAT CHRISTMAS IS ALL ABOUT.**

**IT’S THE INCARNATION THAT WE TALKED ABOUT ON CHRISTMAS EVE – GOD BEING BORN IN HUMAN FLESH IN THE PERSON OF JESUS OF NAZARETH WHO IS IMMANUEL – *“GOD WITH US.”***

**BOTH OF THESE IDEAS ARE INCREDIBLY REVOLUTIONARY.**



**THE IDEA OF GOD LIVING AS A REAL PERSON AT A REAL TIME IN HUMAN HISTORY IS REALLY BEYOND OUR COMPREHENSION.**

**EQUALLY REVOLUTIONARY & INCOMPREHENSIBLE IS THE IDEA OF GOD USHERING HEAVEN TO EARTH.**

**YOU MAY REMEMBER A BELINDA CARLISLE SONG FROM THE '80'S THAT INCLUDES THE LINE – *“THEY SAY IN HEAVEN LOVE COMES FIRST – WE’LL MAKE HEAVEN A PLACE ON EARTH.”***

**I’M PRETTY SURE BELINDA CARLISLE DIDN’T HAVE THE BOOK OF REVELATION IN MIND WHEN SHE PENNED THOSE WORDS & YET THEY APPLY TO THIS PASSAGE NEVERTHELESS.**

**THIS REVOLUTIONARY IDEA OF HEAVEN ON EARTH IS THRILLING TO CONSIDER.**

**AND IT'S HERE IN THIS PASSAGE THAT WE FIND  
THOSE WORDS THAT BRING SUCH COMFORT TO US IN  
A TIME OF SORROW OR GRIEF WHEN THE VOICE  
FROM THE THRONE SAYS, *"HE WILL WIPE EVERY TEAR  
FROM THEIR EYES. DEATH WILL BE NO MORE;  
MOURNING AND CRYING AND PAIN WILL BE NO  
MORE..."***

**AND THEN, THAT SAME VOICE SAYS, *"SEE, I AM  
MAKING ALL THINGS NEW!"***

**REMEMBER – THIS ISN'T SOME FARAWAY PIE-IN-  
THE-SKY KIND OF PLACE – THIS IS RIGHT HERE ON  
EARTH – RIGHT IN THE VERY PLACE THAT GOD HAS  
CHOSEN TO DWELL!**

**YES – THIS IS A REVOLUTIONARY THOUGHT THAT  
GOD IS COMING TO MAKE THINGS BRAND NEW!**

**WHAT'S IMPORTANT ABOUT THIS, THOUGH, IS THAT THE BOOK OF REVELATION ISN'T THE ONLY PLACE WE READ WORDS LIKE THESE.**

**ALL THROUGH SCRIPTURE WE FIND GOD DOING A NEW THING.**

**THROUGH THE PROPHET ISAIAH, GOD SAYS, “REMEMBER NOT THE FORMER THINGS, NOR CONSIDER THE THINGS OF OLD. BEHOLD, I AM DOING A NEW THING.”**

**THROUGH THE PROPHET EZEKIEL, GOD SAYS, “I WILL GIVE THEM A NEW HEART AND I WILL PUT A NEW SPIRIT WITHIN THEM.”**

**THE APOSTLE PAUL SAYS TO THE CORINTHIANS, “THE OLD HAS PASSED AWAY; BEHOLD, ALL THINGS ARE NEW.”**

**THESE ARE GOOD WORDS TO HEAR AT THE END OF AN OLD YEAR AND THE BEGINNING OF A NEW ONE.**

**THEY ARE WORDS THAT ASSURE US THAT GOD IS MORE CONCERNED ABOUT OUR FUTURE THAN HE IS ABOUT OUR PAST.**

**THAT'S THE POINT OF ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF OUR WEEKLY WORSHIP HERE AT EASTMINSTER – OUR CONFESSION OF SIN AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, THE ASSURANCE OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS.**

**THAT'S WHY WE FOLLOW IT UP EACH WEEK WITH THE GLORIA PATRI – SINGING GLORY TO GOD FOR THE ASSURANCE OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS – THE PROMISE THAT GOD IS MORE CONCERNED ABOUT OUR FUTURE THAN OUR PAST.**

**EVERY MOMENT WE EXPERIENCE GOD'S  
FORGIVENESS WE ARE GIVEN A NEW BEGINNING – A  
NEW START ON THE FUTURE THAT GOD HOLDS  
BEFORE US.**

**LET'S GO BACK, THOUGH, TO THIS  
REVOLUTIONARY IDEA OF HEAVEN COMING TO  
EARTH INSTEAD OF US GOING TO HEAVEN.**

**WHEN GOD TELLS US THAT HEAVEN IS GOING TO  
BE HERE & THAT GOD IS GOING TO USHER IN THAT  
ETERNAL KINGDOM RIGHT WHERE WE LIVE, WE'RE  
ALSO BEING TOLD THAT WE HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY.**

**HERE AGAIN, WE FIND PASSAGES GALORE THAT  
SUPPORT SUCH AN UNDERSTANDING.**

**GO ALL THE WAY BACK TO GENESIS AND WE FIND  
GOD INVOLVING ABRAHAM & SARAH IN THE DIVINE  
PLAN FOR THE WORLD.**

**AND THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN GOD'S PLAN IS  
SPELLED OUT IN THIS PASSAGE WE'VE READ THIS  
MORNING.**

**WE HAVE A PLACE IN GOD'S PLAN TO USHER IN A  
NEW KINGDOM ON THIS EARTH.**

**AGAIN, THIS IS A REVOLUTIONARY IDEA, BUT IT'S  
RIGHT THERE IN GOD'S WORD!**

**AND IT'S APPROPRIATE FOR US TO CONNECT OUR  
OWN PERSONAL ROLE IN THAT PLAN WHEN WE  
CONSIDER OUR OWN NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS – OR,  
NEW YEAR'S REVOLUTIONS BECAUSE THE PLAN OF  
GOD IS REVOLUTIONARY!**

**FOR MOST OF US, MAKING NEW YEAR'S  
RESOLUTIONS IS, MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, AN  
EXERCISE IN FUTILITY.**

**I SAW A POLL THAT WAS TAKEN JUST THIS PAST WEEK THAT LISTED THE TOP 10 NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS PEOPLE ARE MAKING THIS YEAR.**

**I FOUND IT INTERESTING THAT THE CHURCH CAN PLAY A ROLE IN AT LEAST HALF OF THEM.**

**HERE ARE THE 5 FROM THAT TOP 10 LIST THAT STRUCK ME AS HAVING RELEVANCE TO THE CHURCH—**

***DO MORE GOOD DEEDS.***

***LEARN SOMETHING NEW.***

***DO MORE EXCITING THINGS.***

***MAKE BETTER FINANCIAL DECISIONS.***

***FOCUS ON SELF-IMPROVEMENT.***

**IF ANY OF THOSE HAPPEN TO BE NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS YOU'RE CONSIDERING MAKING THIS YEAR, I DON'T THINK YOU NEED ANY COMMENTARY**

**AT ALL TO REALIZE THE ROLE THE CHURCH CAN  
PLAY IN EVERY ONE OF THEM.**

**LET ME SUGGEST ANOTHER RESOLUTION,  
THOUGH – ONE THAT WASN'T ON THAT TOP TEN LIST  
– ONE THAT CAN PERHAPS TIE A WHOLE LOT OF  
THINGS TOGETHER.**

**IT'S A RESOLUTION THAT CAN GIVE SUBSTANCE  
TO THE WAY IN WHICH GOD CALLS US TO PARTNER  
WITH HIM IN A REVOLUTIONARY WAY IN BRINGING  
HEAVEN TO EARTH.**

**IT'S A RESOLUTION THAT CAN CONNECT OUR  
DIVERGENT SCRIPTURE POSSIBILITIES FOR TODAY.**

**LET ME URGE YOU TO RESOLVE TO DO  
SOMETHING THAT IS DESPERATELY NEEDED IN THE  
WORLD TODAY – PERHAPS MORE THAN IT'S EVER  
BEEN NEEDED BEFORE.**



**LET ME URGE YOU TO RESOLVE TO TRULY LISTEN  
WITH AN OPEN MIND TO THOSE WHOSE VIEWS  
HAPPEN TO BE DIFFERENT FROM YOUR OWN.**

**I THINK THAT COULD GO A LONG WAY TO  
PARTNERING WITH GOD IN A REVOLUTIONARY WAY  
TO BRING HEAVEN TO EARTH.**

**YOU MAY REMEMBER THE “CALVIN & HOBBS”  
COMIC STRIP THAT UNFORTUNATELY IS NO LONGER  
IN SYNDICATION.**

**CALVIN WAS NAMED FOR THE EMINENT  
THEOLOGIAN JOHN CALVIN & HOBBS FOR THE  
RENOWNED PHILOSOPHER THOMAS HOBBS & THE  
COMIC EXPLORED GREAT THEOLOGICAL &  
PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES.**

**IN A COMIC FOR NEW YEAR'S EVE A NUMBER OF YEARS AGO, HOBBS ASKS CALVIN, "DID YOU MAKE ANY RESOLUTIONS FOR THE NEW YEAR?"**

**CALVIN GOES ON A TIRADE, SHOUTING, "NO! I'M FINE JUST THE WAY I AM! WHY SHOULD I CHANGE? IN FACT, I THINK IT'S HIGH TIME THE WORLD STARTED TO CHANGE TO SUIT ME!**

**I DON'T SEE WHY I SHOULD DO ALL THE CHANGING AROUND HERE.**

**IF THE NEW YEAR REQUIRES RESOLUTIONS, I SAY IT'S UP TO EVERYBODY ELSE, NOT ME! I DON'T NEED TO IMPROVE!**

**EVERYBODY ELSE DOES!"**

**CALVIN FINALLY TAKES A BREATH & ASKS, "HOW ABOUT YOU? DID YOU MAKE ANY RESOLUTIONS?"**

**WITH A FLABBERGASTED LOOK ON HIS FACE,  
HOBBS SAYS, “WELL, I HAD RESOLVED TO BE LESS  
OFFENDED BY HUMAN NATURE, BUT I THINK I BLEW IT  
ALREADY!”**

**THOUGH THAT COMIC APPEARED ON NEW YEAR’S  
EVE MORE THAN 20 YEARS AGO, IS IT NOT EVEN MORE  
APPROPRIATE FOR NEW YEAR’S EVE, 2017?**

**SIMPLY LISTENING TO ONE ANOTHER –  
ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO HAVE DIFFERENT  
BACKGROUNDS, DIFFERENT BELIEFS & DIFFERENT  
UNDERSTANDINGS – CAN GO A LONG WAY TOWARD  
PARTNERING WITH GOD TO MAKE HEAVEN ON EARTH  
A REALITY.**

**AND THEN THERE ARE THOSE DIVERGENT  
PASSAGES & OBSERVANCES FOR THIS DAY.**

**ON THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS, WHEN WE READ ABOUT MARY & JOSEPH PRESENTING JESUS IN THE TEMPLE, THE RIGHTEOUS OLD MAN SIMEON TOOK THE BABY IN HIS ARMS AND SAID, “*MY EYES HAVE SEEN YOUR SALVATION, WHICH YOU HAVE PREPARED IN THE PRESENCE OF ALL PEOPLES, A LIGHT FOR REVELATION TO THE GENTILES...*”**

**ALL PEOPLE – EVEN THE GENTILES – THAT’S EVERYONE.**

**AND WHEN WE CONSIDER OUR EPIPHANY OBSERVANCE & CELEBRATION AND THE VISIT OF THE WISE MEN, MATTHEW TELLS US THAT “*IN THE TIME OF KING HEROD, AFTER JESUS WAS BORN IN BETHLEHEM OF JUDEA, WISE MEN CAME FROM THE EAST...*”**

**“FROM THE EAST...” IS MATTHEW’S WAY OF  
TELLING US THEY WEREN’T JEWISH.**

**THEY WEREN’T KINSMEN OF MARY & JOSEPH.  
THEY WERE DIFFERENT.**

**THEY WERE FROM A DIFFERENT LAND, A  
DIFFERENT RACE, A DIFFERENT LANGUAGE & THEY,  
NO DOUBT, HELD DIFFERENT VIEWS OF THE WORLD.**

**AND YET GOD SPOKE TO THEM & THEY  
ANSWERED GOD’S CALL.**

**YES, WHATEVER OTHER NEW YEAR’S  
RESOLUTIONS YOU’RE MAKING THIS YEAR – AND  
PERHAPS THEY INCLUDE SOME OF THOSE POPULAR  
ONES THAT CAN EASILY CONNECT TO THE CHURCH – I  
HOPE YOU’LL MAKE A RESOLUTION – OR A  
REVOLUTION – IN YOUR HEART TO TRULY LISTEN TO  
THOSE WHO ARE DIFFERENT FROM YOU & THOSE**

**WHO HOLD DIFFERENT BELIEFS AND  
UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE WORLD.**

**I MENTIONED “CALVIN & HOBBS.”**

**THE FINAL SYNDICATED “CALVIN & HOBBS”  
COMIC STRIP APPEARED AT THE END OF DECEMBER  
IN 1995.**

**CALVIN’S FINAL WORDS TO HOBBS ARE – “...A  
*BRAND NEW YEAR! A FRESH, CLEAN START! A DAY  
FULL OF POSSIBILITIES! IT’S A MAGICAL WORLD,  
HOBBS, OLE BUDDY!”***

**SO IT IS.**

**THANKFULLY, OUR GOD IS A GOD OF A FRESH,  
CLEAN START!**

**EVERY DAY IS A DAY FULL OF POSSIBILITIES IN  
THIS MAGICAL & REVOLUTIONARY NEW WORLD!  
AMEN.**

