

Sermon 4.24.16

Pastor Josh Ferris

Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year C

Acts 11:1-18 | Revelation 21:1-6 | John 13:31-35

Dearly beloved

We are gathered here today

To get through this thing called life

Electric word, life

It means forever, and that's a mighty long time

But I'm here to tell you

There's something else

The after world

A world of never-ending happiness

You can always see the sun, day or night

Back in 1984, Prince released "Purple Rain" – his sixth album, the one that he'll be remembered for. The first song was called "Let's Go Crazy," and it started with these words. They're good words for *us* this morning, as we gather together not just to help each other through this thing called life, but to do so by drawing hope from one of the most beautiful passages in all of scripture.

Have you ever read a book, and somewhere in the middle wondered, "Where is this going?" Or maybe watched a movie and at some point thought to yourself, "Where in the world is this headed?" Today's reading from Revelation is God's answer to that question. It's the answer to where all of creation is headed, where God's story of redemption is going, the conclusion that God is drawing all of us towards. It's the promise of a new creation, where God dwells with us, wiping away every tear, a time and place where there is no more pain, no more crying, no more mourning, no more death.

We live in what many theologians call the “in-between” time. In-between the perfect world of God’s original creation in the beginning and God’s perfect new creation at the end. In-between the victory of the cross, the triumph of Christ’s resurrection and the full coming of God’s kingdom. We live in-between, in this thing called life, and sometimes it can be difficult and confusing. And if Prince were sitting in our pews today, I’d tell him that the way we get through this thing called life is by being together, and by trusting God’s promises, especially the promise we heard this morning.

Usually these words in our passage from Revelation are reserved for funerals, to bring us comfort and hope at the loss of our loved ones. They remind us that as God’s people, death is *not* the worst thing that can happen to us, not by a long shot. In fact, through faith, we trust that death in this world is simply entry into the next, a place of eternal hope and healing, light and peace, where pain and mourning and death are no more.

But these words aren’t just about comfort in death, they’re not just about final destinations and end times, these words are also cause for hope here and now, in the lives we’re living each day today. For this reading from Revelation reveals the overarching and all-defining reality of how God is at work in our world here and now: the one seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” (Rev. 21:5)

God is making all things new.

God is always doing new things. God is always bringing *newness*. In Isaiah, God said, “See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:19) In the book of Lamentations, those who were exiled proclaimed that God’s compassions never fail, and that “they are new every morning.” (Lamentations 3:22-23) Paul wrote, saying, “So if

anyone is in Christ, there is a *new* creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become *new!*" (2 Corinthians 5:17) This is the hope and promise of our faith – that God is always working to bring about new life, always at work doing a new thing, that even on a cross, a place full of deep darkness and pain, even then God is bringing new life and hope.

And through faith, we are given the eyes to see it.

Whenever people experience forgiveness and grace, *that* is God making things new.
Wherever chains are broken and greater freedom is known, *that* is God making things new.
When people are cared for and served and included and valued, *that* is God making things new.
Whenever injustice and oppression are struck down and justice and equality are made reality, when violence is exchanged for peace, and war for unity, when people come together, where love is found, *that* is God making things new.

Do you not perceive it? It's been the whispered hope and prayer of millions throughout time, that God is making all things new.

When Noah looked out at the world's destruction and saw all that he knew washed away, as the flood waters rose and the world became dark, it was his whispered hope and prayer: God is making all things new.

As Abraham climbed the mountain with his son Isaac to do the unthinkable, as his world was shattered and he was torn apart with grief, it was the secret hope that he carried in his heart: God is making all things new.

While Israelite slaves toiled under their Egyptian masters, making bricks with straw in the hot sun, it was the message of hope that passed from person to person, whispered on hushed lips full of faith: God is making all things new.

When God's people were cast into exile, spread far and wide in foreign lands with foreign gods amidst foreign people, it was the lesson of faith that they taught their children: God is making all things new.

It was the courage and joy of the earliest believers as they were martyred for believing in Jesus, praying for God to forgive those who harmed them, singing hymns of faith: God is making all things new.

As Martin Luther hid after being exiled and declared an enemy of the church, it was the faith and courage to keep writing and proclaiming the Gospel: God is making all things new.

It was the prayer carried in the hearts of Puritans and pilgrims, Quakers and Anabaptists as they fled from religious oppression to a new land across the sea, carrying only that simple promise: God is making all things new.

It was the willingness of union soldiers as they went into battle, committed to the truth that all people are created with dignity and worth, believing that the injustice of slavery would not win: God is making all things new.

It was the songs of faith sung by slaves in our nation; the hope of black people as they marched and struggled for justice; the burning prayer in the heart of Martin Luther King Jr. as he proclaimed God's kingdom and refused to respond to the hate he received from white people and white churches with more hate, but instead found the strength to love: God is making all things new.

It is the drumbeat inside those who raise their voices today to proclaim that Black Lives Matter, pointing to the vision of a more just and equitable world and trusting that it is God's vision, for God is making all things new.

And this past Monday, as thousands of athletes gathered in Boston, as two people who lost limbs in the bombings just three years ago ran the race again, it was the words of blessing spoken by Reverend Nancy Taylor as she said, “Three years ago, evil, enemies, and death visited the Boston Marathon. And yet, look at you. Look at what you defied, then came back, from death to life.” It was a proclamation, a defiant cry, one that has been passed throughout time, and the same we proclaim today: God is making all things new.

Peter discovered this truth so long ago, in our first reading today from the book of Acts. Like most of Jesus’ earliest followers, Peter was Jewish, and he had grown in a world that believed that only Jewish men and women could be part of God’s people. He had always been taught that everyone else – Gentiles – were on the outside looking in, unclean and unworthy. But one day he had a vision, a vision of God declaring unclean things to be clean. He spent time with Gentiles believers who had the Holy Spirit, who knew and loved and followed Jesus, and he realized that God was doing a *new* thing. He discovered that the message of grace and forgiveness through Jesus Christ is for *all* people, that the church is place for *everyone* to know and experience God’s love and new life. Peter was in awe, for he saw that God is making all things new, even our beliefs, behaviors, and ways of seeing the world. Even us.

This means that we may be uncomfortable, as our old ways of being are challenged. Sometimes God making us *new* may be difficult, because it means that our old ways of thinking and acting and believing are being *unmade* and formed into something new.

But as God makes us new, we are called to go and make the world new. Through a new command to love one another, God sends us to make this world new, to tear down injustice, to

stand against oppression, to feed the hungry, to comfort those who mourn, to care for this in need, to share Christ's love.

And in the midst of our struggles and discomfort, and in the midst of the injustice and darkness around us, in the midst of fear and loss, our hope and prayer rings out: God *is* making all things new into the glorious reality of his kingdom. And dearly beloved, as we are gathered here today, that is enough to get us through this thing called life. Amen.