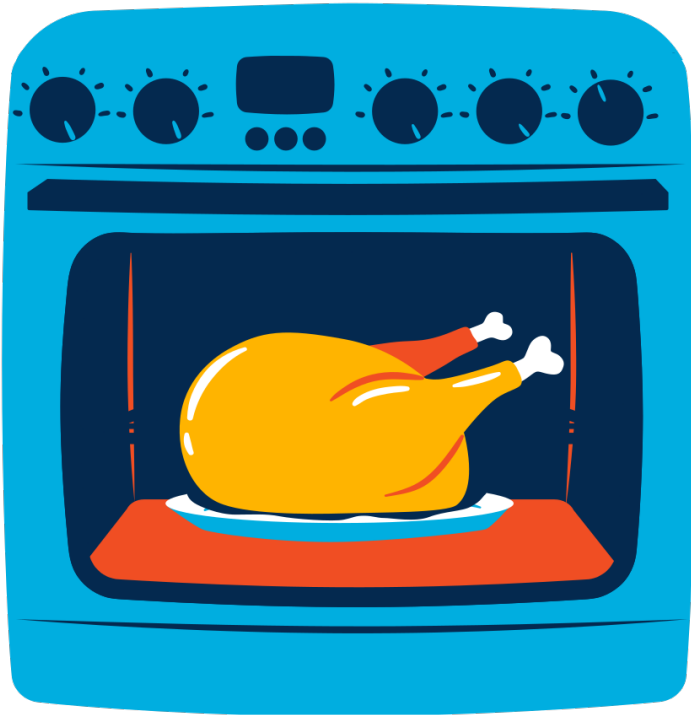


May 15, 2022

# Fifth Sunday of Easter

The Rev. Garrett Yates  
St. Anne's in-the-Fields Episcopal Church

Revelation 21:1-6



*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, the 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,*

*“See, the home of God is among mortals.*

*He will dwell with them as their God;*

*they will be his peoples,*

*and God himself will be with them;*

*he will wipe every tear from their eyes.*

*Death will be no more;*

*mourning and crying and pain will be no more,*

*for the first things have passed away.”*

*And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Then 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 as a gift from the spring of the water of life.”*

—Revelation 21:1-6

There was a priest who served in a rural congregation in Alabama who had a reputation of being rather eccentric. My friend who attended his church told me about a time after serving communion at the altar, suddenly, in full vestments, he walked down the aisle and out the church door. He started up his car and drove off. The congregation sat there, not really knowing what to do, but being polite Episcopalians didn't do anything. About 5 minutes later the congregants heard his car roll back up with great speed, the door slammed and he walked back up the center aisle in full vestments. At the altar he said in a loud voice, "I left the chicken in the oven – let us pray."

"I left the chicken in the oven – let us pray" pretty nicely sums up the life of the Christian. We live in the world, we have to eat, have to make a living, we get bogged down with the mundane yet we also live drawn by the magnetism of God's mystery. We feel the homeland of a kingdom of God which upturns our day to day; we pray to our Father that his might be done here as it is in heaven. I left the chicken in the oven. Let us pray.

One of our faiths many vocations is not to leave the mundane and the heavenly realms polarized, but to see, hear, taste, feel the beauty of God in the sacrament of the present moment, in the sacrament of the world gifted us, in the sacrament of relationships gifted us, inviting us to see into the depth of the surface. Faith is the pursuit of the echoes, footfalls and resonances of the transcendent – within the reality of the universe as in the reality of the self. We live at once in the Kingdom of the Ordinary, and the Kingdom of Heaven; at once, in Boston, and in the New Jerusalem. We have two addresses, two citizenships; not necessarily two different worlds – that'd be to keep heaven and earth polarized – but two different realms, you might say, of the same world.

Boil the faith down to a single concept, and I'd suggest to you that maintaining this double-vision is at the heart of it, gaining the eyes of faith. To be more precise, its to see the world – the heavenly and the mundane – with God's eyes,

to more and more bring our vision into harmony with the divine vision. Consider all the “sight” words in our reading from Revelation: I saw a new heaven and a new earth; and I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem; See the home of God is among mortals; See I am making all things new. This sight is possible because God is wiping away every tear from every eye. Faith is about seeing.

When you read the resurrection accounts of Jesus, you’ll notice how difficult it is, unnatural it is, for the disciples to recognize Jesus upon seeing him. In the Gospel of John, we are told 7 times that while marvelous things were seen, something entirely different was believed. Mary sees the stone rolled away; conclusion drawn: the body has been stolen. The two disciples see the linen clothes; Peter, not yet having developed the eyes of faith, doesn’t make anything of it. Mary sees the angels, but she still sees through the eyes of unbelief, the body has been stolen. Mary sees Jesus, and the text says, she mistakes him for a gardener. The story of those first disciples is a story of them learning that in Jesus’ resurrection they live in two realms now – heaven and earth have been brought in such proximity, and it takes the eyes of faith to see it.

Left to themselves, human beings lack the eyes of faith. We often don’t see the world as suffused with holiness. We judge people by how much they look and act and reflect ourselves back to us, how much they confirm what we already believe. Our listening of others is often waiting for them to finish talking so we can get back to what we were trying to say. We look out and see the world not with the eyes of faith, but with the eyes of privilege. Quite often how we see the world as determined by our pasts. In seminary we learned about ministers as wounded healers; so often our love runs the other way and we are unhealed wounders. All that is unforgiven, unreconciled in us, that unhealed hurt is projected out onto the world; perceiving others not as they are, but as they are refracted through the prism of our own hurt. We don’t see others, and if we can’t see the other standing right in front of us, no wonder it’s hard to perceive

the resurrected Christ alive in our midst. Its difficult to see, but not impossible.

There was a priest friend I had in college who I always sensed saw Jesus moving through the world. He saw people for who they were – and he always had the most affirming look in his eye. He was an old, wise soul; and I know this because he wore spiritual bifocals. Through one lens he saw you as you were, and the other was seeing you in another light, as if you were shining like the sun. In the height and depth of his presence, I was a citizen of Birmingham, but also I was destined for the New Heavens and the Earth. Like my old priest, we need to wear our spiritual bi-focals. And to see people as they truly are: muddled and confused, sure... but always as they are in God, as people who will one day shine like the sun.

This past week I saw a lady standing out at the corner of Codman and 126. Her bike was laid off on the other side of the road. I started walking out towards her thinking she might not be okay. She had just waved at a car. I thought maybe she had a flat tire, or had fallen off her bike, or just needed a ride. So I called out over the traffic – everything okay? She mouthed something back to me, but I couldn't hear it because of the cars. What? Plover. Still couldn't make out what she was saying, but she had a smile on her face, so I crossed the street to hear her better. There's an unusual bird right there; I think it's a piping plover. Normally you find them on the coastline, but one is right here, and can't you hear what a magnificent sound they make? It took me a second to find the bird she was pointing at – they are rather small, but I saw it, and I heard its lovely call. My friend was just riding along, until she was met by a birdsong. Creation alive, not there to be driven past – worthy of laying your bike aside, stopping your car, and just witnessing. She helped me see this world. I know it's a tiny example. But our days are full of opportunities for bi-focaled vision.

There are many parts of the tradition that are there to help us grow in seeing the world, and each other in this new light.

One of the things I am most drawn to in the Eastern Orthodox Church is their deep reverence of icons, these painted windows into eternity. Typically most of the icons of the resurrection, like the one on the front of your bulletin, depict Jesus standing on a precarious looking bridge. He stands in the middle and beneath his feet are shattered gates, broken chains and padlocks scattered about. Down in the dark cave you see the primal parents Adam and Eve, they are usually depicted as old – sin has made them old - and Jesus is offering his hands and lifting them out of the hell they are in. Richard Rohr says that “religion is for those who fear hell and spirituality is for those who have been through hell.” This is a liberation from hell, a liberation into the new heavens and new earth. But the interesting thing about the icon is how the Savior seems not to just be lifting our ancient parents to himself, but also towards one another.

Remember that one of the first things Adam does after the fall is blame Eve, and Eve blames the snake. Its as if Jesus takes them by the hand and reintroduces them to one another, to see one another on the other side of their blaming match. Dissolving their loneliness, he shows us how we are compulsive dividers, compulsive grumblers, and he offers us a bridge back to life. Resurrection is here not just as a moment of seeing the faithfulness of God’s love that searches us out and won’t give up on us, it is a moment when human beings are reintroduced to each other across the gulfs they have constructed. Jesus gives us a fresh way of seeing one another – sinners not to be blamed but to be understood. Fragile and often cruel to ourselves, and capable of so much more. Grown old, but being made young again. Jesus enters into the hells of the world, and as it were slips into pockets a passport to a fuller world. Easter is about reconnection.

I wonder who you feel at a distance from this morning; if there is a relationship in your life that needs reconnecting. Easter is an invitation to close the distances that separate us. Easter is an invitation to pick up the phone and call the one

who needs your care, your forgiveness. Easter is about the glory of God and the mundane practices of earth, heaven and earth joining hands. Christ is Risen, therefore put a card in the mail to someone with whom you've had a conflict. Death is no more, thus consider to whom you have grown prickly? With whom you have been short-tempered? That might be the person Jesus is drawing you closer to today. Let me remind us, Easter isn't a one off event that happened to Jesus; easter must happen in us. Through us. Between us. We should be careful, and I preach to myself here, that we are not Christian in name and atheist in life. Easter is about new vision. Seeing people as they are. Accepting their wounds; acknowledging the burden they carry; the ways peace and conflict are at war in them; the ways they fall short of their idealized selves. But quietly bearing witness that there is more to them. Often the people we struggle most to see are the people right in front of us. So consider how you are seeing maybe a child of yours. Or your spouse. Or yourself.

To see another in all their humanity – their ordinary, unexciting, slightly frustrated, sort of depressed humanity – and also as someone who will one day shine like the sun. Try this vision out this week, see what you see. For me, this is what love sees. It's the divine vision. Its how God sees us. Accepting us just as we are. Never giving up on us. But drawing us into an ever gathering fullness, until we, body, mind, and spirit are fully alive in God.

