

Sermon – “Alpha and Omega”
Scripture – Revelation 21:1-6, John 13:31-35
Sunday, May 15, 2022
Blythe Denham Kieffer, D. Min.
Westminster Presbyterian Church
Springfield, Illinois

As we continue our journey through the seven weeks of Easter, today’s scripture reading is from the Book of Revelation, chapter 21, verses 1-6. This is the final book in the New Testament. The vivid symbolism within this apocalyptic epistle encourages first century believers during a time of persecution. In today’s reading of Revelation, John of Patmos envisions the end of time which presents a beginning...*a new heaven and a new earth*... something totally new and beyond our imagination. Hear now God’s Holy Word.

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. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. God will dwell with them; they will be God’s peoples, and God will be with them and be their God⁴ God 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.”⁵ And the One who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” This One also said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” ⁶ Then this One 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. Amen.

Today’s gospel reading is from John, the Apostle, chapter 13, verses 31-35. Once again, our reading reveals the interwoven nature of beginnings and endings at the heart of our faith. Following the symbolic washing of the disciple’s feet before their final meal together as Jesus’ time with his disciples is about to end, he announces a new commandment to love one another as he has loved them. Hear now God’s Holy Word.

When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³² If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in God’s self and will glorify him at once. ³³ Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ ³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.” Amen.

The title of the sermon “Alpha and Omega”

Text: 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 21:6

Let us pray: Holy and Loving God, from whom we come, to whom we return, and in whom we live and move and have our being, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet and a title for Christ and God in the Book of Revelation. The phrase "I am the alpha and the omega" is sometimes further clarified with the words "I am the beginning and the end, the first and the last" and is meant to affirm that God, and Christ as a person of the Trinity, are eternal and eternally kind giving water to the thirsty from the spring of the water of life. The saving death of their Risen Lord was on the hearts and minds of first century believers who faced chaos, persecution, and turmoil in their Roman world. This reminder of God's nature and character provided comfort and strength on their journey between the beginning and the ending of their lives.

The reference to the sea in John's vision of the new heaven and earth recalls the Genesis story when God gathered the watery chaos and marked the boundaries between dry land and sea. With this creation, God held chaos at bay. But underwater evil and turbulence would menace us and continually threaten to undo God's good creation. John's culminating vision at the end of Revelation describes a future when evil, turbulence and chaos are no longer lapping at our shore — the sea is no more. The peace of this scene, the relief after living so long with this threatening sea, is much more profound once we understand the narrative thread beginning with Genesis and ending with John's vision.

This lectionary text on the fifth Sunday of Easter could not be more timely, according to the Rev. Dr. Terri McDowell Ott, editor of the Presbyterian Outlook. The sea of turbulence and evil is churning off the coast of Ukraine where innocent people are slaughtered and war rages. The chaos of the pandemic and all it has revealed about our world – the inequities and anxieties, the divisions among us – has wounded us in more ways than we are yet to even realize.

The good news of Revelation, the hope of John's vision, is of a God who is “making all things new.” A God who dwells among mortals frames our story – the Alpha and the Omega – the beginning and the end. Our future with God is a beautiful scene of peace, a redemptive day of hope and promise fulfilled...when *God will wipe every tear from our eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more.*

As we gather on this Confirmation Sunday to witness these bright, young people profess their faith, John's message of hope and affirmation could not be more timely. It cannot and should not go unnoticed that their journey through confirmation during the pandemic has been one of interruptions, chaos, and turbulence. It has been a time of isolation, apprehension, and anxiety. Much of their learning has taken place at home on Zoom or in a classroom practicing social distance while wearing masks. In less stressful circumstances more young people would be standing before us today also professing their faith. As we continue to pray for our families, let us not underestimate the toll of this pandemic on our youth.

And so, we join John in words of hope and Jesus in words of mandate on this momentous day as you continue between the beginning and ending along the way of your faith journey. The words we leave with you, beloved confirmands, are simply:

Remember who you are and to whom you belong. Remember that you are a child of God. Remember that you belong to the Alpha and Omega, the One who was there to hear your morning cry and the One who will be there when you are old.

Remember that you belong to the God who joined us in our humanity in Christ Jesus and who then went on to conquer death by dying on a cross...the God who forgives, the God who provides new beginnings, and the God who gives water to the thirsty along the way.

Remember that you belong to the God who calls you to be a witness to what you believe, to live out your faith in acts of kindness, self-control, and generosity, to love one another as Christ has loved you, and to treat all people with dignity and respect.

Remember as you go out into the world to pursue your dreams and aspirations, our prayer is that you will prosper and make a positive difference. Remember when you face challenges, disappointments, losses, and perhaps stumble from time to time, our prayer is that you will pick yourself up and start all over again. Why? Because you are a child of God. The Spirit of the Lord is upon you. You are embraced by the grace of God. There is nothing you can do, there is no place you can go that will be able to separate you from the love of God, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Remember also, that you are a child of this congregation. You have a home in this house of God. You will find nourishment and strength for the journey here. You are always welcome.

See what love the Alpha and Omega has given us that we should be called children of God, and that is who we are. Amen.