

*“God Will Wipe Away Every Tear”*

Sermon for First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Decatur, Georgia

All Saints Sunday, November 2, 2014

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Texts: Revelation 7: 9-17

<sup>9</sup> After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. <sup>10</sup> They cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

<sup>11</sup> And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, <sup>12</sup> singing, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

<sup>13</sup> Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?”

<sup>14</sup> I said to him, “Sir, you are the one that knows.”

Then he said to me, “These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. <sup>15</sup> For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. <sup>16</sup> They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; <sup>17</sup> for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Sermon

The inscription inside the front cover of my first funeral manual,

given to me 29 years ago at my ordination

by my father in law Don Brewer, reads:

*“For and in being a comforter.”*

## **For and In Being a Comforter**

This morning of All Saints Sunday we will explore the Holy Source of comfort.

Let us turn first to the Holy Scriptures.

*“I lift my eyes to the hills.*

*From whence does our help come?” (Psalm 121: 1)*

In times of suffering and loss, who will offer succor?

Who will wipe away our tears, and ease our burdens?

From whence does our help, our comfort come?

Such a question was raised in the Book of Revelation,

where we first encounter John of Patmos.

John was a servant of Jesus Christ,

and he aligned himself with the suffering Christians

who were being persecuted by the Emperor Domitian.

John lived in exile on the island of Patmos,

off the west coast of Asia Minor.

His fellow Christians were being persecuted by Domitian

because they refused to worship him,

to call him Lord or Savior or even God.

For their civil disobedience and spiritual practices

they were arrested, lost their possessions,

suffered economic boycotts, and in many cases, were put to death.

To people in struggling churches and struggling with life,

John of Patmos offered a strange, wonderful, and visionary book  
we have before us called “The Revelation to John”.

He stressed the Lordship of Jesus Christ,

the powerful grace of God,

and the ultimate victory of good over evil,

love over hate, grace over sin.

Listen again to these words from Revelation:

*After this I looked, and there was a great multitude*

*that no one could count, from every nation,*

*from all tribes and peoples and languages,*

*standing before the throne and before the Lamb,*

*robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.*

*10 They cried out in a loud voice, saying,*

*“Salvation belongs to our God*

*who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”*

John of Patmos was sharing that he was given a vision of an inclusive multitude.

Can you envision with John an inclusive multitude?

What would it take?

Reflect the diversity the Spirit has made in the image of God.

Worship and come together as if all are one before the Lamb of God,

because we are One before the Lamb of God.

This is an image of hope, a vision of fulfillment,

and a celebration of the diversity of God’s creation.

How many is a multitude?

A multitude is huge number, one so big that it is impossible to count,

an infinite quantity,

like a wide sea of shining faces and souls saved by the grace of God.

The Revelation is a living testament of the magnitude of God's grace,  
of love unbounded and unfettered by any limitations of exclusiveness.

John of Patmos wrote down the vision, the revelation  
in the same vein as classic apocalyptic literature,  
in the same genre as Daniel and Ezekiel,  
prophets who had apocalyptic vision of God.

Daniel dreamed dreams and was freed from lions,  
while Ezekiel saw visions of hope in a valley of dry bones.  
Revelation is clearly an effort to comfort, strengthen and encourage  
a people who are hurting and broken,  
folks just like us who are coping with great loss and grief.

### **For and In Being a Comforter**

Unfortunately some spiritual leaders have used Revelation as a scare tactic.

Their emphasis is on the apocalypse.

**“Apocalypse** (Greek: "lifting of the veil") is a term  
applied to the disclosure to certain privileged persons  
of something hidden from the majority of humankind.

Today the term is often used to refer to the end of the world,  
which may be a shortening of the phrase *apokalupsis eschaton*  
which literally means "revelation at the end of the æon, or age".

(definition from Wikipedia)

When we view the apocalypse, the lifting of the veil, the revelation of God

from a position of fear,

fear of being alone, fear of being left behind,

fear of exclusion from the kingdom,

then our own fears

keep the God of grace and glory at a  
distance.

When we choose instead

to view the apocalypse from a place of faith,

we leave fear behind,

and we can take on a faith that we will be included,

we can build a faith that we will be brought along

with the saints who have gone on  
before us.

When we leave fear behind

and let our faith leap and lead us into grace upon grace,

we are freed to tap into the supreme source of comfort and hope.

Lift the veil, let the revelation sink in,

for comfort comes to you from God,

a loving and merciful and forgiving Creator who loves you

and a multitude just like you,

all made in God's image from the beginning.

These are words of hope and comfort.

Not one word, not one element of fear here in Revelation.

If the revelation is indeed a revealing of the grace of God,

why should we be afraid?

Even the discussion of tribulation and trials and tragedy

is offered to the people in the past tense.

We have already moved through the pain,

we are past the suffering and are able to cope with loss.

*“Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?”*

*“These are they who have come out of the great ordeal;*

*they have washed their robes*

*and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

*15 For this reason they are before the throne of God,*

*and worship him day and night within his temple,*

*and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.*

*16 They will hunger no more, and thirst no more;*

*the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat;*

*17 for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd,*

*and he will guide them to springs of the water of life,*

*and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (Rev. 7: 14-17)*

A friend said he learned this line as a youth

and it has stuck with him ever since:

*“One day God will wipe away all tears from our eyes;*

*until that day God will cry with us.”*

### **For and In Being a Comforter**

When George Burns reached 100 years old

he was asked what he would like on his epitaph.

George Burns replied, *“I would like to be standing there reading it.”*

Remember and celebrate the New Creation we are in Christ,

for God enables us to live with loss.

We have lost friends, lost jobs, lost opportunities,

lost mobility, lost talents, lost love.

God and the faith community help us to move and grow forward,

offering to one another that which God intends for us to find...

an amazing grace which God imparts upon our humble hearts.

We live with loss and cope with hope.

We celebrate in our congregation that there is a mighty strength

for people to draw upon,

a blessed support network

in which you and I find nurture in times of grief and loss.

We do not live alone; God is nigh, and we have one another.

### **For and In Being a Comforter**

From whence does our help, our comfort, come?

Let us turn to one another for grace upon grace.

*“One day God will wipe away all tears from our eyes,*

*but until that day God will cry with us...*

*and until that day we will comfort one another*

*and offer each other the gift of hope.”*

God gives strength and stands with those who do justice,

who love mercy, who walk humbly with their Lord.

We are to do and to be the same as Jesus Christ,

if indeed we are to be the Body of Christ in the world today.

This is what it means to be incarnate,

to build and become the beloved community.

In 1962, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference

under President Martin Luther King, Jr.,

were invited to Albany, Georgia to help make social change.

Persecution and oppression along racial and class lines

were a regular part of life.

Dr. King met with the Albany Ministerial Association,

whose president was a young Christian Church pastor named Don Brewer.

Between 1959-1965 Nancy and Don Brewer served at First Christian Church

in Albany, Georgia, raising Betty and her brother Bob,

who, by the way, was named after Bob Boyte (a former pastor here).

Soon the Albany Movement began.

There were large demonstrations and many arrests, and little change.

Well, lives were changed and altered and were never the same again.

One hot summer day Nancy was washing dishes in her kitchen.

She thought about her neighbors in jail,

arrested simply because they walked downtown to register to vote.

She imagined them in jail being served cold grits and tepid tea.

Lord, in the south surely that is a sin!

She thought,

*“What is it Southern women do when they see someone in trouble, sick, or grieving, and they really don't know what to say but they want to do something? You*



*know what they do. They cook! My husband and I wondered if some of my United Church Women friends would be willing to fry some chicken to send to the jails.*

*“It took only a couple of calls to get a calling chain going. Almost to a woman, the answer was, “I’d like to do that.” And almost to a woman, the firm statement was added, “But let’s not tell my husband.” It wouldn’t be a problem NOT to tell the men. They wouldn’t even ask, for they were used to their wives frying chicken, or baking cakes, or assembling casseroles for somebody they knew.*

*“By Tuesday morning there were trays and baskets and boxes of fried chicken gathered, the pieces wrapped individually, and ready for delivery. The logical place to find out how to deliver the chicken was the police department... which turned out to not be logical at all, since the response was, “Now, little lady, why would you want to do that?”*

*Fortunately we knew the name of a prominent black minister, from newspaper write-ups when Dr. King had been there the week before. And my pastor husband asked his help and he said he’d be glad to deliver the chicken for us....and I’m sure he did.”*

(Nancy Brewer, “What Does Fried Chicken Say?”)

### **For and In Being a Comforter**

What is it we do when we see someone in need of comfort?

We cook. We empathize. We reach out.

We wipe away tears; we shed a few of our own.

We testify that death is a new beginning in Christ, a transition of grace into grace.

We have this hope.

In communion with Christ and one another,

we find ourselves able to move forward in life, and in life after life.

After Peter Marshall died,

Catherine, his wife, was offered condolences for her loss.

She said, *“My husband Peter is not lost; I know exactly where he is.”*

We, too, know where he is; he lives again with Christ in life everlasting.

*All power to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!*