

SERMON
“Dreaming Like John and Praying Like Jesus”
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St. John’s Chapel UCC

John 17: 20-26

“I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in You, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that You have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one. I in them and You in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that You have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which You have given me because You loved me before the foundation of the world.

“Righteous Father, the world does not know You, but I know You; and these know that You have sent me. I made Your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which You have loved me may be in them, and I in them.

Revelation 21: 1-6, 22: 3b-4 (*I will read as the beginning of my sermon*)

SERMON

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. 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,
[God] will dwell with them as their God;
They will be [God’s} peoples,
And God himself will be with them;
[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.”

And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new....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)

And [God’s] servants will worship [God]; they will see [God’s] face, and [God’s] name will be on their foreheads. (Revelations 22: 3b-4)

What a wonderful vision? A vision that speaks to our deepest longings! Who among us would not like to put an end to the pain and crying of this world—especially, the pain and crying that comes with death? Yet mourning, crying, pain and death is a given. The mortality rate still runs at 100 percent.

John, the preacher man of Revelation, was a visionary if ever there was one. We “preacher types” like to paint our little optimistic pictures sometimes: even the secularist once had a vision that human advancement through technology could make it all better. “The Communist **dream** of a proletarian state,” says preacher man David Buttrick, “and the American

dream of a technological messiah, have both floundered on the hard facts of human nature.”¹ Confidence in a better future gets smaller and smaller as we watch the hungry get hungrier, peace becomes a distant dream, and the greening of American the Beautiful is replaced by visions of the horrific river of oil finding its way to the beaches of the Gulf.

Those who believe technology can fix all environmental and energy problems have been silenced as they watch clean-up responses fail. To this 2010 environmental catastrophe, no end is in sight. My heart breaks as I watch a people and a culture I love waiting to see if the bayous and swamp lands of Louisiana will soon be no more.

A German from West Virginia, my grandfather left West Virginia to go embrace the life style of a Cajun marsh man. This life style choice never made sense to me. Yet when the news tells me this place of my ancestors may soon be no more, something deep within sobs. The land of which songs were written, “Jambalaya, crawfish pie, and fillet gumbo, ‘cause tonight I’m gonna see my ma cher amio. Me gotta go pole the pirogue down the bayou.” Have you ever seen a pirogue on the bayou? Well, the chance to do so may soon pass you by.

Where, in all of this, is there a place for John’s utopian dream? It’s so—“otherworldly.” What with pollution, terrorism, and drugs, we’ve got enough on our hands without hankering after some make believe town in the sky—some New Jerusalem dipping out of clouds toward the earth. Yet, there is something that calls from John’s dream. “I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down ...from God....And I heard a loud voice saying..., ‘Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be more.’ ”²

For a while there, it truly seemed we were going to do away with hunger. Norman Borlaug developed technology to grow crops large enough that no one would have to go hungry.

¹ David G. Buttrick, *Preaching Through the Apocalypse*, “Poetry of Hope,” p. 162.

² Ibid, p. 160

Never heard of Norman Borlaug? Neither had I until I became a hard core Bread for the World person. Nor had I heard that he came this “...”close to ending world hunger.

How could I have not heard of him? He was one of only six people to have won the Nobel Peace Prize, the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Congressional Gold Medal. Yet when he died in September of just last year, I heard not one mention of his name. I’ll admit it; I am not the best at following the news. Did you hear his name? Do you know who he is?

Norman Borlaug, a plant breeder from a small town in Iowa, saved the lives of more than perhaps any other human except Christ. He is hailed as the father of the Green Revolution, a movement teaching farmers in third world nations how to produce enough food to sustain themselves. And it worked, in Mexico and in Asia. His scientific and technological breakthroughs in developing new wheat and rice strains and revolutionary farming methods held the potential of ending world hungry...until something went terribly wrong. He could not sustain the support needed. Simply put, he could not keep it afloat.

Maybe we should just dump the Book of Revelation. Yet we can’t kick the habit, or at least I can’t, of dreaming...of dreaming of the day when everything will be alright. “A new heaven and a new earth”—is it a bunch of hogwash or is it a dream worthy of our trust?

Do you know the American painting entitled *The Peaceable Kingdom*, by Edward Hicks? It shows a lion lying down with a lamb, a barnyard cow and a grizzly bear nuzzling each other, while in among the animals the children play. Sometime I think the artist never heard of drug lords dealing death in Columbia and Mexico. Perhaps the lion and the lamb can declare a truce, but what about the Islamics and the Muslims, or what about the warring factions in Iraq and Afghanistan? We live in a world of power-politics that will only allow the city in the sky to descend on planet earth if we turn in our hearts to God.

Dreams like John's can ring in hope. Dreams of a world where mothers do not cry their children to – death, a place where we wipe away each other's tears, because we have seen the face of God, and proudly we wear the name of God on our foreheads.

Bread for the World, in its early years, found itself competing with the new pulpit, known as cable TV, that was focused more on what you were doing with your brethren, in reference to all things sexual, than on what you were doing for your brethren. Then one day a man from Dublin, Ireland, who could Bible-thump with the best of them, began to point out to the deeply religious, “moral majority” members of Congress that there were more than 2,100 passages about caring for the poor. He would sit and search the scripture with them, and the tide began to turn. The man, Paul Hewson, who later adopted the rock star name of Bono, knew he had to have a dream born of God to turn the tide. Today conservative religion is shifting focus. There is a growing clamor that no one has to starve in an age of plenty, not just among left-wing types, but among people of good will everywhere. The tide can turn when we dream like John—a dream born on the wings of God.

On this seventh Sunday of Easter, we know what God can do. God can raise out of pain, crying, and even death...a new humanity. What is Easter but a vision reversed? At the foot of the cross were nations in conflict, corrupt religions, darkness, pain, crying and death. Oh, but come Easter morn, a new vision rises from the ashes. Only God has the power to overcome chaos, death, mass-evil, and humanity's impossible mean streak to make something new. To wake us up to possibilities that once seemed impossible.

Easter is not about just personal survival...or about no more death. Could there be anything more wearisome than the “me” never evolving past this earthly existence? And it is about more than life after death. It is about a whole new vision of a world at peace—a vision

that requires us changing. It is about the answer to the last prayer Jesus prayed, according to the gospel of John. Jesus prayed, “Oh, God that they could become one like You and I are one.” He prayed that when an entire culture is at risk, we all will grieve, not because they represent our Cajun heritage, but because we are intimately connected and in love with with all of creation. As connected and as in love as Jesus was with God. So connected that when a child dies in Africa, we grieve as mothers and fathers who have had to watch our own child die.

Yes, it is an unjust world, an angry world, a crying world—but the spirit is on the move! Can’t you feel it? God is doing a new thing. The tide is shifting. There is a rising cry for justice. Can you not see what God is up to in this world?