

## “New”

Don't ask me why, but I spent most of last weekend, Sunday afternoon and Monday, putzing with computers. Like many households we have accumulated some electronic clutter over the years. I was determined to deal responsibly with our digital dinosaurs, which necessitated a Frankensteinian effort to bring new life to a once-useful laptop—“It's alive... alive!!”—so that I could give it away; and a determined attempt to revive a maddeningly sluggish family room computer, liberating it from obsolete adolescent software so that the old folks at home might again utilize it for E-mail before E-mail in its turn becomes obsolete. Great weekend!

Lofty goals sometimes demand drastic measures. I began with a disc-cleaning program that completely overwrote all data and programs on the computers' hard drives. It was the software equivalent of pithing their little electronic brains. I had nothing to lose. I was taking slow, annoying, dysfunctional, outdated boxes of frustration and returning them to the moment before the Big Bang. Behold, I make all things new... or so I thought.

But what I discovered was that I was not in fact going back to nothing. I was not quite making *all* things new. There was just enough computer consciousness remaining to make sense of the next thing I told it, which was to reload the operating system I was providing it on a disc. When we got to the end it turned out to be remarkably like the beginning. This was an experience that proved to be a very odd lens through which to view this morning's lesson; but then, it's an odd lesson.

Over the past several weeks we've seen a progression with the message of Easter. It began of course on Easter Sunday with the empty tomb and John's story of Mary Magdalene and Jesus in the garden. Then the news began to spread. First it accomplished the spiritual resurrection of the disciples, making them fearless, effective and determined. Then it manifested itself in Jesus' followers accomplishing great deeds of healing and power, culminating in Peter raising a woman from the dead. And finally it erupted in a message of good news with the power to bring down the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles. With the Spirit of the

risen Christ at large in the world, nothing will be impossible! Easter continues.

But today's lesson takes the conversation to yet another level, assuring us that resurrection is both cosmic in scope and personal in its impact.

Suddenly we're in the book of Revelation. People flee this book because of its strangeness; but really what's strange is not the writing itself but what interpreters have done with it. Revelation is not so much prediction as proclamation; not a roadmap so much as it is a sort of cartoon allegory. It is a second century science fiction word-film, heavy on the special effects.

In its proper ancient context the central message of Revelation regards worship. The truth is that we become like that which we worship, so we'd better worship the right thing. We can worship the God of love revealed in Jesus Christ; or we can worship the empire of Rome, and specifically the person of the emperor who has recently decided that he's divine. Christians who don't capitulate are being persecuted. The message of Revelation is, "hang in there, because God is triumphant in the end." People object to the violent and gory imagery in Revelation, but it simply dramatizes the real life experience of some of the early Christian communities.

Our passage for this morning comes from the end of the book and the culmination of the contest between good and evil. It reads like the sun coming out after a violent storm; or like the gentle resolution of a raging symphony. There has been an immense struggle over the soul of creation. Will it be faithful to God's good purposes? The answer is Yes. But to get there we pretty much end up clearing the hard drive.

Now we're rebooting, and all things are new... but not quite all things. There is a new heaven and a new earth. The sea is no more. The Hebrews, desert nomads and land lubbers that they were, never liked the sea, anyway: it was a source of chaos and destruction. The language is reminiscent of creation, but this time there's not a garden but a Holy City, where the Temple is, where worship on earth will be like true worship in heaven. The imagery is that of a wedding: life, consecration, holiness, new beginnings, rejoicing.

The upshot of it is that God will be among us, among mortals, among all the *peoples*, plural. There will be no more tears, no more death, no more pain: "...nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord," as the Apostle Paul would put it.

And a voice from the throne says, “See, I am making all things new.” But that’s not quite right, is it? Not everything is being made new, because there is still that which has always been: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.” Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. So everything is made new *except the love of God*, which is the beginning and the ending. God is our source and our destination. When we get to the end of the journey we discover that it has all been a long journey home.

How else could you convey a message like this, except in the language and imagery of Genesis: heaven and earth? And the newest new thing turns out to be what has been all along.

Don’t cry. It’s OK. We’re home.

This isn’t just a powerful image. It’s also the message on which we can build our lives. It’s the reminder that the things we are tempted to worship, things for which we scratch and claw and strive, things we grant the power to tell us who we are, are things we don’t need because our lives from beginning to end to beginning are in God.

Don’t, “store up for yourself treasures on earth,” to coin a phrase, because security is not to be found in having many multiples of more than enough. It’s not security, it’s stuff.

Don’t climb over others to reassure yourself that you’re OK, deriving your sense of worth from those you can look down on: I’m smarter, prettier, richer, more enlightened, more refined, more virtuous, more whatever. Remember the teacher who said to the competitive class, “You all have A’s. Now let’s learn something.” No one is a loser in God. We all have A’s.

Don’t fear the losses that are a part of life. Everything we have and love will be taken away from us: our youthful good looks, our families, our friends, our possessions, our capacities and abilities... it all goes. The drive is wiped clean in the end, which turns out to be the beginning. So love, yes; and grieve your losses, yes: but don’t live in the fear of mourning. Don’t let that fear stop you from loving.

Don’t live in fear of those who are different, because ultimately what’s most personal is most universal and the deeper we go the more we have in common and the more our differences dissolve into our shared humanity. We are part of a human family, and beyond that we are a part of creation, which we have in common with all things; we are creatures of the God who is Alpha and Omega.

When you boil it down, this is an astoundingly simple message. In the parlance of the season, resurrection is real. Easter is cosmic in scope.

But it is also intensely personal. If it's true that what is most personal is most universal, it's also true that what's most universal is most personal. We are made who we are by our connection to the God of all things, our beginning and our ending, our source and our destination, our be-all and end-all. And this loving God calls us by name and gives us everything we need. In the poetry of our passage for today, God gives us water "as a gift from the spring of life."

In the poetry of a different time, on the evening of his betrayal, Jesus Christ said it differently: "this is my body which is broken for you." This is all you need for life that is full, true, meaningful and abundant. This is your daily bread from the one who is your beginning and your ending. Come to the table. Remember who you are. Give thanks and rejoice.

Amen

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