

A New World

There's a resting place along the sidewalk over the Lake Street Bridge where people can pause and look out toward downtown Minneapolis. From that point, they can see the urban skyline of buildings with the Mississippi River flowing through the middle. Trees edge both sides of the river. As the seasons change, so do the vibrant colors of leaves. Sometimes, people write words like "peace" along the railing or leave a short prayer. These "revelations" from people's hearts were especially true in 2020 after the protests and unrest following George Floyd's murder.

From this bird's-eye view, we can contemplate the fullness of life in the city. We can wonder, "Will the city become a place where all can thrive?" Perhaps you have a place in your local community that invites similar reflections.

Scripture tells us Jesus paused at the Mount of Olives (Luke 19:41-42) and looked mournfully out over his city, whose name literally means "City of Peace"—*Jerusalem*. From this resting place, Jesus saw the whole city, and with a prophet's heavy heart, he wept among the ancient olive trees. Before him was the city named for peace, but inhabited by those who did not know the things that made for peace!

No wonder, decades later, another visionary named John imagined the same City of Peace, while he lived on the Greek island of Patmos. John was a Christ-follower, exiled under the fearsome reign of Roman Emperor Domitian. In what seemed at first like a terrifying nightmare, John then envisioned a renewed city, a bright, shining city. In contrast to "Babylon," the deathly city of trauma and suffering, John's "New Jerusalem" emerged as God's own dwelling place.^[1] In John's dream, the Holy One had relocated, moving down to Earth, taking up residence throughout the whole city. In announcing God's hope for Creation, John heard a sublime voice: "See, the home of God is among mortals!" (Rev. 21:3).

Eco-theologian Catherine Keller offers her interpretation of John's theological pivot: "The divine...gets revealed as immanent to the world. It is no longer found dwelling *above* as most of the tradition before and after presumes, but 'dwelling with them' - *cohabitating*."^[2] What John envisioned countermands a 'rapture' out of God's Creation for another universe. Keller claims that "collective transformation takes place with the dramatic shift away from the picture of God ruling, Caesar-like, from above...[T]his making-new takes place not as a *replacement* but as a *renewal*...not a supernatural

substitution."^[3] Thus, "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1) signifies Christian hope for all things new, not God making *all new things*.^[4]

In preaching as United Methodists, we can find support for regenerative hope as we align the Revelation text with the gospel lesson from John (13:31-35). The bridge can be built by connecting Jesus' love for his friends with God's love for the renewed Creation, as identified in the "Preamble" of our revised *Social Principles* (2024):

From the beginning, God called us into covenant, bound with God, with one another, and with God's wonderfully diverse Creation. God called us, further, to live lovingly in those relationships...According to Jesus' commandment, we are to love one another: 'Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other' (John 13:34-35)^[5]

Curiously, both John's Gospel and John of Patmos' prophecy draw on a wedding feast to imagine the profoundness of God's love. Recall that Jesus' first public act was unveiled at a wedding feast in Cana (John 2:1-11), and Revelation portrays the relationship between the bride-city and the Lamb-groom (Rev. 21:2) as a cosmic celebration of love.

In our time, 2025, we can continue believing into Christ and the expansiveness of divine love by inviting congregations to reflect on recent decisions of our General Conference—removing the exclusive language of the *Discipline* regarding ordination and LGBTQ people, as well as affirming the words of the revised Social Principles that marriage is "a sacred, lifelong covenant that brings two people of faith...into union with one another."^[6] The lectionary texts invite us to discern "what the Spirit is saying to the churches" (Rev. 2:7) as we love one another into beloved community within God's whole Creation.

But then, how strange that in the prophet's vision, "the sea was no more" (21:1)? The signifier of chaos and fearsome storms (remember, John had been shipwrecked!), the sea transported Roman military and policing power throughout the empire. No wonder then, John's vision of New Creation included an absent sea. In our time, we can ask ourselves what dangerous entities we hope become "no more" in our own futuring of New Creation—drone warfare, drought and floods, school shootings, toxic waste incinerators, gender- and sexuality-based violence? As an imaginative exercise,

consider Doug Gay's liturgical poem based on Revelation 21, but written through prophetic eyes for his city, "The New Glasgow":

*I saw a vision – it was last Thursday at eleven o'clock in the morning:
I was standing on the Necropolis, looking down over the city;
and the cold blue winter sky broke open above my head
and the Spirit of God breathed on my eyes
and my eyes were opened.*

*I saw Glasgow, the holy city, coming down out of heaven;
shining like a rare jewel, sparkling like 'clear water in the eye of the sun';
and all the sickness was gone from the city,
there were no more suburbs and schemes;
no difference between Bearsden and Drumchapel.*

*I saw the Clyde running with the water of life,
as bright as crystal,
as clear as glass,
the children of Glasgow swimming in it...[7]*