

Revelation 21:1-6: *John sees a vision of the New Jerusalem descending from heaven, and a voice that proclaims that God's dwelling place is now among people on earth.*

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. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he 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." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." Then he 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.

John 13:31-35: *Jesus' new commandment – to love one another.*

Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 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.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

This pericope is part of John's narrative of the Last Supper, where Jesus washes the disciples feet, and reveals one of the disciples will betray him. When the betrayer had left the gathering, Jesus' next words contain the commandment 'to love one another' and that 'by this, everyone will know that you are my disciples - if you have love for one another'. The word 'Maundy' simply means commandment, and Maundy Thursday's central focus is a remembrance of the Last Supper, and this final commandment from Jesus commandment: love one another. It is not a once a year in the Easter season but a commandment that profoundly shapes our lives, and Christian community, and the Christian witness to the wider community. More easily said than done?

COCU35C Easter 5C Readings

The power of Easter lies not just in the life it offers us, but also in the way we are recruited to be life-bringers. Love is never easy, it is always messy, unpredictable and scandalously inclusive. But, if we seek to follow Christ, we cannot avoid the privilege and the responsibility we have to be people of love.

Jesus' new commandment is frequently sung and quoted, but the "one another" that Jesus' calls us to love is often limited to Christian believers. Now, in the lectionary, as the Gospel is read alongside the other readings, we realise that this "one another" goes much further. In Acts, we discover that the previously excluded Gentiles are now included in God's Kingdom. In the Psalm, all of creation is included in this "one another" as the entire creation is exhorted to offer praise. And in John's Revelation vision, we discover that God so includes all, that God moves God's dwelling place ("heaven") into our earthly neighbourhood. There can be no greater, all-encompassing statement of love for all from God. We have no more excuses for turning the Gospel into an exclusive message!

One of the big questions of our generation is "who is in and who is out?" Global economic and trade regulations are designed to favour some (who tend to be the wealthy) and disempower others (who tend to live in developing countries). Political conversations are always being drawn in partisan ways with clear lines indicating who is on which side - and woe betide those who try to cross those lines. Religious communities and power structures, equally, have tended to focus on who is with us and who is against us. From geographical to economic to political to religious to theological to racial to sexual to generational lines, our world is built on defining who is in and who is out. The prophetic Church, the Church of the resurrection, of love, of the God who lives among us, must be a Church that blurs every line, and invites everyone into the grace and love of God – and a Church that challenges the lines that exclude and oppress. This is what Jesus calls us to when he instructs us to love one another, and it is what is demonstrated in Peter's willingness to minister to the Gentiles in Cornelius' house, and in God's gift of the Spirit to these "outsiders". In practical terms, then, we are called to be those who will reach across the lines to welcome and embrace those who believe, think, dress, behave and live in ways that we would consider different.

(John van de Laar, Sacredise)

Acts 11:1-18: *Peter explains to the believers in Jerusalem how the Holy Spirit was received by Gentiles in Caesaria.*

Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, saying, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.' But I replied, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' But a second time the voice answered from heaven, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.' This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.'

And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?" When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, "Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life."

Psalm 148: *A psalm exhorting all of creation and all peoples to praise God.*

Praise God! Praise God from the heavens; **praise God in the heights!**
Praise God, all God's angels; **praise God, all the host!**
Praise God, sun and moon; **praise God, all you shining stars!**
Praise God, you highest heavens, **and you waters above the heavens!**
Let them praise God's name, **for God commanded and they were created.**

God established them forever and ever;

God fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.

Praise God from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps,
fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling God's command!

Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!

Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds!

Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth!

Young men and women alike, old and young together!

Let them praise God's name, for God's name alone is exalted;

God's glory is above earth and heaven.

God has raised up a horn for the people, praise for all God's faithful, for those who are close to God. **Praise the Lord!**

Israel is strengthened by God to effect a blessing not only for "all the families of the earth," but also for all the creatures and features of creation! Israel's "praise" is less a special status and more a responsibility or mission. God's people, then and now, praise God by enabling the rest of creation to be what God has called it to be. (*"Exegetical Perspective," J. Clinton McCann Jr*)

Where is God in these words? The theological anthropology of Psalm 148 is finally a theological ethic that requires the human family to take care of creation as a fundamental accompaniment of its core belief that humanity's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy God forever. Knowing that this chief end is shared with all creation means that we have a fundamental responsibility to support and nurture the highest beings of heaven and the lowest creatures of earth so that their voices continue unabated in the universal, combined choir.

(*"Theological Perspective," D. Cameron Murchison*)

The human race is able to vocalize praise for the rest of creation and so has a *responsibility* to serve as the surrogates of praise for all the other inhabitants of the cosmos. The splendour of God, the very holiness of God's nature, ought to make us want to give such worship. Within the psalm there is the suggestion that, at the very least, the faithful are to praise God because God "has raised up a horn for his people", that is, God has bestowed dignity upon them. (from *"Pastoral Perspective," W. Michael Chittum*)

Calling the heavens to praise God is a joy; when the focus shifts to creation, it becomes a list of fearful things: sea monsters, the deep, fire, hail, and wind; forces of destruction called to praise God. To those whose homes have been devastated by a natural disaster, it is an enormous challenge to imagine the elements praising God. Then the focus swings to the rulers and peoples united in praise. It is easy to say that God is praised through a congregation's ministry, but what about the conflicts and topics that cannot be broached? Can the community face these challenges in a way that moves their common life back up into united praise? (from *"Homiletical Perspective," Drew Bunting*)