

Sermon: Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21 (Easter 7C)  
Christ Church Riverdale, 16 May 2010  
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Revelation 22: 12 "See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." 14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates. 16 "It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." 17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let everyone who hears say, "Come." And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift. 20 The one who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! 21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen. (NRSV)

"Come, Lord Jesus." In today's reading from the Book of Revelation, we heard most of the very end of the book. The vision of the New Jerusalem has been completed, and now Christ assures the church he will come again soon. This is a vision of hope to a church suffering under cruel persecution. So the book is more than a story, more than a description. "Come, Lord Jesus," the writer exclaims. "Come, Lord Jesus," Christians have said together from the very beginnings of the church. "Come," say the Spirit and the Bride, who is the Church.

The Book of Revelation is a kind of literature intended to give hope to a people suffering from oppression, that no matter how bad things are now, God will make things right in the end. For Christians at the time Revelation was written how bad things were had a lot to do with the Roman Empire. One of the ways the Roman Empire held onto power was with an official religion that deified the Emperor. Christians and Jews refused to play along--refused to worship the Empire and its caesar--so they were persecuted, locked up, tortured, and killed. "Come, Lord Jesus!" Christians cried out together as some escaped the worst persecution of the Empire and others felt its full burden.

Revelation offers a vision of hope that one day Eternal Rome will come to an end. The vision of hope ends with an urgent plea for the vision to be realized. But that vision was written nineteen-hundred years ago, and our world is a lot different now. It doesn't take an empire to push the average person down, or to make it seem like things will never change for the better. Some people feel stuck in a job that doesn't challenge or satisfy so that they can keep up with the bills. They feel trapped in maintaining a certain lifestyle. But if you succeed in the rat race, what does that make you? Others would like nothing better than to feel trapped in a job right now, because that would mean they had a job. Come, Lord Jesus!

The amount of oil we use in this country leaves us with only bad options: buy it from countries on the other side of the world who don't share our democratic and egalitarian values, or drill for it in places like deep in the Gulf of Mexico, where weeks after the accident oil continues to gush out unabated. Engineers scratch their heads and try to improvise solutions for a problem they didn't see coming. That they didn't see it coming doesn't make the oil come any slower or

do any less damage, though. Come, Lord Jesus!

Times Square--one of the busiest neighborhoods on the planet--has been the target of a bombing attempt. Thankfully the attempt was foiled, but with tens of thousands of cars traveling through there daily and thousands parking, even the best vigilance is strained. And what would it accomplish to blow up theatergoers, tourists, New Yorkers going about their business, street vendors, or people dressed up in cartoon costumes for photos? Come Lord Jesus!

This is how the Book of Revelation, written near Turkey 1900 years ago still has something to offer us in the here and now. God will make things right in the end. Think about the song "We shall overcome." "Deep in my heart I do believe that we shall overcome someday." People in the civil rights movement knew what John of Patmos, the author of Revelation, knew: that God will make things right in the end. Does that mean they sat down to wait for it? Of course not! "We shall overcome someday" was a vision of hope that strengthened people in their present circumstances. It helped them endure the taunts and the fire hoses and the arrests and the beatings and kept them marching forward one step at a time. The vision of the future gave them the courage and strength to do what needed to be done to make progress in the here and now. It helped keep hope alive.

And we still need hope, in buckets. Hope is not the same thing as optimism. Optimism can be the belief that things will all be for the best, that they aren't so bad, after all, and they'll get better through human progress or even just on their own. Hope, on the other hand, faces the darkness head on; it acknowledges that things are bad that the darkness is real and powerful, but hope trusts that God's light will ultimately prevail over the darkness. Hope doesn't minimize the suffering of victims, but it trusts God's love for us. Optimism can be shattered by enough negative circumstances, but hope is a gift from God--a gift the world tries and tries to take away, to knock down, put in jail--but can't.

This is the hope that gives us strength to say, "Come, Lord Jesus!" These are not just words that we say, but a life that we live. Even as we trust Christ to come, we have our part to do in helping Jesus come into situations in a million smaller ways. The very conviction that God will make things right in the end gives us the strength to take steps toward the beginning of the end. Every time we do what is right instead of what is easy or convenient, every time we act out of love instead of self-interest, every time we help those who have no one to help, we are crying out, "Come Lord Jesus!"

What's more important, we're living it out!