

## Reflection for May 18, 2025 – The “Resurrected” Commandment

### Inspired by Revelation 21:1-6 and John 13:31-35

Did you know that there is an “endangered species day?” This year it was last Friday. Endangered species day is a day dedicated to raising awareness and promoting conservation efforts for endangered species worldwide.<sup>1</sup> Endangered species day occurs annually on the third Friday of May. The day serves as a reminder of the urgent need to protect and conserve species that are at risk of extinction. Like a lot of special days on our calendars, I had no idea it existed.

A first impression from the reading of our text from Revelation this morning, is that the author also concerned himself with species extinction. However, in this case it is the human species that is the focus. The entire book of Revelation is apocalyptic, extolling the end times of the earth as we know it. In today's reading 21:1-2 ***“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.”***<sup>2</sup> Later in the text, <sup>5</sup> ***And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.”***

There are many who suggest the world is a mess, and God has deemed it time to say, “Out with the old and in with the new.” Revelation, for these interpreters, graciously warns its audience, “God is starting over. Don’t get left behind!”<sup>2</sup>

This mindset has in fact been preached many times over the years from pulpits in North America. And it still is.

Thankfully there are many with other points of view. As the ancient biblical texts are studied more and more, new interpretations arise, new perspectives suggested. That can be helpful, especially when we encounter apocalyptic verses.

Is it possible do you think that the earth and heaven passing away could be a good thing? In these times when we wish for real change in the world, I see the image of something entirely new as desperately needed. There is often so much to hold in our prayers we can’t do it all justice.

Famine and flood, rising seas and cataclysmic weather events are normal these days. Anger and hostility against neighbouring countries fill the daily news headlines. A total lack of care and empathy for humanity is alarming. Yes God, come in with your omnipotent power and wipe the slate clean. Give us another Noah event. Let’s begin anew! Except, of course, that God told Noah that ***“the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.”*** Genesis 9:15 That’s a bit of a contradiction isn’t it.

Anna Bowden offers a different perspective. She suggests that God doesn’t abandon us. In fact, heaven and earth are not destroyed, because God comes from heaven to be with us.<sup>2</sup> ***“And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”***

We are reminded, says Anna, that ***“we are not heaven bound. Heaven is bound for us. God has come to dwell among God’s people, even in our moments of pain and suffering. So, yes, it might be tempting to destroy it all and rebuild from the ground up, but that is not the work God calls us to do. God calls us to join God in the good work of redemption, the work of radical care. We don’t have to burn it all down. We don’t have to escape to some new world. God meets us right here on earth. God is not waiting for us to join God in heaven. God is waiting for us to join God in the good work right here on earth.”***<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [endangered species day 2025 - Search](#), accessed May 16, 2025

<sup>2</sup> [Commentary on Revelation 21:1-6 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#), accessed May 16, 2025

<sup>3</sup> [Commentary on Revelation 21:1-6 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#), accessed May 16, 2025

I'm drawn to that last line. **God is waiting for us to join God in the good work right here on earth.**" There is an invitation, God beckons us to join in the mending, healing, reconciling work that needs to be done. God, Creator and Holy Love encourages us to work together in what we could call an incredible massive resurrection.

In ancient times as in the present, hatred, corruption, and war existed. Selfishness has plundered the human soul and spirit for millennia. And yet God, Holy Wisdom, continues to remind us there are more just ways to travel through life together, and that there is always the potential for renewal.

I think Jesus' "New Commandment" we heard today in our gospel reading could be the key. In preaching truth, healing with touch and word, and speaking justice, Jesus had a huge capacity to love. His love was unconditional, and he embraced everyone regardless of their culture, educational, or ethnic differences. That is essence of a new world, a new order of discipleship.

Today Jesus would be here offering you assistance getting in or out of the sanctuary. He would be in the kitchen washing the dishes or serving cookies. He would be helping sort clothing in the Bin and pastoring to those who needed to share their grief. He would be in downtown Kelowna with the addicts or the unhoused. On days like today he would sit on a bench at the Pavilion and offer words of wisdom and empathy to anyone who would listen. Young children would be sitting on his knee as he told stories.

It would be the same Jesus who lived centuries ago, the same Jesus who said, remember friends the greatest gift you can give is your love. Share that abundantly in whatever way you can.

When we do that, we bring heaven down to earth. We breathe life into the withering soul. We feed the hungry, help to cast out demons, and spread a little sunshine into bleakness.

The writer of the Book of Revelation, John of Patmos (a small island off the west coast of Turkey) had a vision.

***"See, the home<sup>[a]</sup> of God is among mortals.  
He will dwell<sup>[b]</sup> with them;  
they will be his peoples,<sup>[c]</sup>  
and God himself will be with them and be their God;<sup>[d]</sup>  
4 he will wipe every tear from their eyes.  
Death will be no more;  
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,  
for<sup>[e]</sup> the first things have passed away."***

It is an incredible, audacious vision. Unfortunately, it's one that has yet to be realized. Perhaps it might be a bit unrealistic. But Jesus would not think so. His resurrected presence in this time begs us to continue the ministry he started, and work towards the peace and harmony he lived and died for; work toward the time every tear is dried, and pain will be no more.

The how of that is contained in what is likely the most well known of Gospel texts that Brenda shared. ***"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."***

It is not really a "new" commandment now, but we can resurrect it and live it. That way perhaps we can bring heaven down to earth the way that John of Patmos envisioned.

Thanks for listening this morning, Amen