

Today, we have reached the end of our journey through "The Story" in the Bible with a summary of the Book of Revelation titled "The End of Time." In the liturgical calendar, today is also Christ the King Sunday. It is a day when the church celebrates the end of all things by giving thanks to Christ the King. It is Thanksgiving Sunday. The Book of Revelation pictures the creation of a new heaven and earth where all is well.

The whole Bible leads us to this picture in Revelation. The seed that was planted in Genesis reaches full bloom. What is promised in the first pages of the first book of the Bible is accomplished in the last pages of the last book of the Bible.

Right from the start of "The Story" in the Bible, we see how God desires to be with us. The story of Adam and Eve pictures how each of us rejects that idea, preferring to go our way and presuming we know better than God. Yet, God had a plan from the very beginning to get us back. As we have been journeying through "The Story" in the Bible, at times, it has looked bleak in the "Lower Story," but God has never taken God's eyes off that "Upper Story" plan.

Revelation is a vision attributed to John on the Island of Patmos, given to him during a time when the early church underwent great persecution. It begins with seven letters to seven churches. Each church is evaluated for its weaknesses and strengths and then instructed on how to move forward. Following this, there is much talk of angels, horsemen, and seals being broken. There is judgment and the casting out of evil.

It's like a 4D movie invading the senses. All the things that make the world such a terrible place, such as war, famine, plague, and disaster, come to an end. All the forces of empire, violence, and persecution are silenced. And at the center of all things is God, Jesus the lamb of God, and endless waves of praise and wonder that emanate from the Holy Spirit. Today's scripture, Revelation 21:1-4, gives us a wonderful taste of what the future holds for the people of God.

When John was on the Island of Patmos, however, it seemed like all he had hoped for was coming to an end. There God gave him this mind-boggling vision that he passes on to us in the Book of Revelation. Many years from now, I'm pretty sure

that scholars will still be trying to figure it all out. People will be predicting that the end of the world is near and claiming to know all things about the end of times.

To them, I would say, "Good luck!" So far, everybody who has gone down that path has been united by one result. They've all got it wrong. Jesus tells us in the Book of Acts, chapter 1, verse 7, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His authority."

The Book of Revelation was never intended as a pre-emptive calendar to chart the world's end. What it is... is a gift of grace. What it is... is an amazing picture of hope that tells us that love wins at the end of all things. What it is... is a document that encourages us to believe that, in God's time, in God's way, even though it may not look like that right now, all things will be made beautiful. All things will work together for the good of those who love the Lord (Romans 8:28). Amen?

To John, it was an assurance that Rome did not have the final say in the world in which he lived. To us, it can remind us that wherever we perceive power to be invested—be it Washington, Moscow, London, Wall Street, the media, the big corporations, The United Methodist Church, or any organized religion—will never have the last word.

Justice will come. Peace will come. God's Kingdom will come. Christ's love will reign. Amen? And it is for us to embrace that message and do everything in our power to hasten that day by involving ourselves in actions that proclaim the reign of God is alive in our hearts and lives through acts of compassion, care, and deliverance that reflect the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ.

Our calling is not to stand back and see what will happen. Our task is to get busy with what we have in the given situation. Like Bishop Mary Ann Swenson said, "Holiness is resilience, the power to bounce back when knocked down by failure, illness, disappointment, tragedy, or suffering."

On this Thanksgiving Day, I know some of us are having a hard time having a spirit of gratitude. In fact, for many people, difficult times or circumstances are the easiest excuses to justify ingratitude. Yet the Bible says we, the followers of Jesus Christ, are to "be thankful in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for us" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

So, I would like to invite you to join me in cultivating an attitude of gratitude

today by counting your blessings and reflecting on how God has redeemed your troubles in the past. After that, find a way to give back to others in a meaningful way and spend some time reading about God's promises.

I am thankful that we are finishing the 46 weeks of a journey with our "The Story" sermon series today. I am thankful that I was able to participate in the Episcopacy discernment journey this year, even though it was unexpected. I am thankful that I was able to bless three newly elected Bishops in-person, Carlo Rapanut, Cedrick Bridgeforth, and Dottie Escobedo-Frank. As of January 1, 2023, Bishop Dottie will be the Resident Bishop of our conference—California-Pacific Annual Conference. Let us be thankful and bless our newly elected Bishops. And let us welcome Bishop Dottie to our conference with our prayers and support. These are some of the things I am thankful for this year. How about you? What are you thankful for this year?

As we are counting our blessings, I am closing this message by quoting the last words of the last book of the Bible, Revelation 22:21. It says in the King James version, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."