

**“Dwellings: Hope”**  
Revelation 21:1-6a

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We begin the month of November and a new sermon series with the observance of All Saints Sunday. This month is a time to remember and to celebrate the saints that have gone before us. It is also a time to look ahead to Christ’s coming again, and to the rapidly approaching season of Advent. The theme for the messages this month is “Dwellings,” and over the next four weeks we will “discover the many places in which God dwells: the heavens, the earth, the church, and each one of us.”<sup>1</sup> Today’s specific focus is on hope, and how it dwells in us through Christ.

A few minutes ago I read the sermon text from the Common English Bible translation. This is another of my favorite passages, and because of the hope it contains, I often read it at funerals and memorial services. What could be more hope-filled than these words: “[God] will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. There will be no mourning, crying, or pain anymore.” (Rev. 21.4)

Eugene Peterson’s *The Message* puts it another way, and for me at least, his paraphrase makes the promise even more powerful:

*I saw Heaven and earth new-created. Gone the first Heaven, gone the first earth, gone the sea.*

<sup>2</sup> *I saw Holy Jerusalem, new-created, descending resplendent out of Heaven, as ready for God as a bride for her husband.*

<sup>3-5</sup> *I heard a voice thunder from the Throne: “Look! Look! God has moved into the neighborhood, making his home with men and women! They’re his people, he’s their God. He’ll wipe every tear from their eyes. Death is gone for good—tears gone, crying gone, pain gone—all the first order of things gone.” The Enthroned continued, “Look! I’m making everything new. Write it all down—each word dependable and accurate.”*

<sup>6-8</sup> *Then he said, “It’s happened. I’m A to Z. I’m the Beginning, I’m the Conclusion. (Rev. 21.1-6)*

Don’t you love the idea that “God has moved into the neighborhood?” Somehow “moving in” is even more personal than “dwelling with us.” And, of course, hope is still unmistakably portrayed—“death is gone for good—tears gone, crying gone, pain gone.”

I ran across a story about crying and tears this week that really moved me. Tito Madrazo recalled when he was a child and had been crying about one thing or another, his mother would ask him, “Can I have a tear for my pocket?”<sup>2</sup> He admitted that even as a child he realized his tears didn’t seem to be doing him any good, and so he would allow his mother to “rub her thumb

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<sup>1</sup>(Lear 2018)

<sup>2</sup> (Madrazo 2018)

across one of [his] lower eyelids—saturating it with brine—and then plunge it into one of her pockets.”<sup>3</sup>

Madrazo goes on to reflect: “Even after she had performed this same ritual half a hundred times, it still had the remarkable effect of slowing my stream of tears. It was such a bizarre request and action, [he continues] that it jolted me out of my sorrow. Why would my mother want a tear, of all things? And why for her pocket? Did it feel somehow incomplete if not regularly watered with human tears? Wouldn’t my tears just be absorbed, or forgotten, or washed away in the next load of laundry? But [he says he] also felt that in this recognition of the value of [his] tears was, more broadly, an acknowledgment of the sorrow [he] was experiencing and an expression of [his] mother’s love for [him].”<sup>4</sup>

This writer then refers to Psalm 56, which had been in the back of my mind when I read his story. “You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your record?” (Psalm 56.8) The fact that God knows when my heart is troubled, and is aware when sorrow overflows from my eyes in the form of tears, comforts me and fills me with hope.

In addition to remembering the saints today, at the beginning of a new month of Sundays, we also remember that we are a hope-filled people. We Christians do have the hope that death is not “the end,” and we *will* spend eternity with God. However, as hopeful and wonderful as that message is, that is not all there is to it. “The totality of God’s work and love found in the Scripture is even greater. And [here it comes!] it calls us to a larger, ongoing response.”<sup>5</sup>

Something to remember, also, is that the Bible doesn’t begin in Genesis 3 with Eve and Adam’s poor decision to disobey God. The Bible begins in Genesis 1, with God creating the heavens and the earth, and calling that creation good. “And then God continued to create by forming humanity, companions, created in God’s own image, and called us ‘very good.’ Thankfully, God’s story and activity in the world also does not end with Jesus’ resurrection and the empty tomb. At Pentecost, we were given the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the church was born to continue Jesus’ message and ministry continually illustrating the Kingdom of God.... God’s presence and redeeming grace is still well at work.”<sup>6</sup>

“Look! I’m making all things new.” I don’t know about you, but I have days, more and more, it seems, when I long for that time when God makes all things new, and there are no more sad tears, no more reasons to cry, no more pain—physical or emotional. I yearn for that time. But the timing isn’t up to us, and besides, we have work to do right here and right now. When read carefully, John’s vision in the book of Revelation tells us that “God’s plan isn’t to one day just completely scrap the creation that was deemed ‘good’ and have us spend eternity floating among the clouds. God’s plan is ultimate redemption, and that work began with Jesus, and we’ve been invited to participate.”<sup>7</sup>

Our hope is not just for the future, but our hope is for right now. It’s not wrong for us (me) to long for that “one day” when suffering and tears and sorrow are no more. But we can’t

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<sup>4</sup> (Madrazo 2018)

<sup>5</sup> (Lear 2018)

<sup>6</sup> (Lear 2018)

<sup>7</sup> (Lear 2018)

sit around moaning and groaning about how bad things are, just waiting for something good to happen, and for that wonderful time to come. Jesus has called us to be disciples and to make disciples. Especially today, All Saints Sunday, we are reminded “that the faithfulness and legacy of those who have gone before has not been in vain, but is part of God’s plan and work in the redemption of creation. All Saints Sunday is a [good] time to reflect and celebrate those who introduced us to Jesus, helped form our faith, and faithfully served our communities. But this passage and [this] Sunday also serve as a reminder that the baton has been passed on to those of us who remain.”<sup>8</sup>

Yes, God will wipe away every tear, but until then, God is also working in the world right now. We can choose, or not, to join in the work. The thing is, God continues to call to us, to invite us, to equip us, and to send us out. It is our choice. It seems to me that when we are sensitive to the tears of others—when we collect them and put them in our pockets, we are doing God’s work. God, according to the Psalmist, is greatly disturbed and deeply moved by the suffering of God’s people, and those tears call God into actions. Those tears called God “to restore that which has been lost, to bind up the brokenhearted, to usher in a new creation in which every tear will be wiped away.”<sup>9</sup>

Remember, too, it’s not just God who is called into action—we, also, are called to hear the crying and to wipe the away tears. We must permit ourselves to be deeply disturbed and moved to action. We must respond to God’s invitation to help and to be bringers of hope. When our hearts are troubled and our spirits disturbed by senseless acts of violence, it is time to draw on the faith modeled by the saints who have gone before us. God has moved into the neighborhood, and invites us to participate in the work of binding up the broken, bringing healing and hope. Let us pray for strength and courage as we work together, continuing Christ’s work as faithful saints today.

### Works Cited

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<sup>8</sup> (Lear 2018)

<sup>9</sup> (Lear 2018)