

## RADICAL RENEWAL

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### REVELATION 21: 1-5

**1** 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. **2** And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. **3** And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

‘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;<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 the first things have passed away.’

**5** 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.

### INTRODUCTION

Movie trailers allow a glimpse or preview of a new movie. Usually these are very captivating and serve as an advertisement, promising what is to come. They are designed to keep us on the edge of our chairs as we await the release with bated breath and anticipation. A reading of the first few verses of our text potentially leaves us with that impact, it leaves us wanting to experience more of this new dispensation. No wonder a good rendition of the “Holy City” still leaves most of us enthralled.

These verses, signalling the concluding statement of the book of Revelation and the entire New Testament, conveys a very hopeful tone through the assurance that the one seated on the throne is making all things new. Here is an imagery of the triumph of God’s power and authority over chaos and disorder, fear and anxiety, enemies of overwhelming might and power. We get a glimpse of the destructive forces and powers being overcome. There is nothing like it, Heaven has come down to earth, life will be experienced in its fulness forever more as a new order comes into being.

Yet, as we look forward to its unfolding, we must contend with the present, even as the powers of this world stake their claim. God’s people have been entrusted with a mission to proclaim God’s way and rule in Christ Jesus.

As such, the present order cannot be a place of comfort for the Believers' but instead poses enormous challenge for the faithful. Do we withdraw from the world awaiting the fulfilment of God's promise or curl up and die? No, we actively pursue the will of Christ, working for what is just, true, emancipatory and lifegiving, knowing that what God wills and purposes will be brought to fulfilment in God's own time.

Our theme of radical renewal is therefore quite apt, because this vision of all things being made new, is not business as usual. Of necessity this new heaven and earth will involve radical reordering and even reversals. The old passing away in totality, on a cosmic scale, replaced by a newness that makes a qualitative difference. Human pretensions are brought to judgement. What then is the challenge to the church as we gather for the 20<sup>th</sup> Believers Conference and on the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Ana Baptist Movement.

### **SUSTANIED RESISTANCE**

It is a call for SUSTAINED RESISTANCE against the powers and forces which are in opposition to the truth of the word of God.

In the face of increasing polarization and fragmentation. The church must put up a strong and sustained resistance against the perpetrators of these systemic evils. The sins of racism, xenophobia, exploitation and the structures that support them have led to exclusion, inequalities, inequities and injustices, denying people their dignity and the possibility to flourish. And we must resist their sponsors!

Oh, how we long for peace in the face of wars, conflicts, instability, climate catastrophes but how can there be peace when such suffocating expressions of injustice abounds? The levels of inequity and poverty in the world are astounding with wealth concentrated in the hands of a few who mock the poor and dandle food before their eyes like candy available only to those who are good girls and good boys. Large populations of people experience food insufficiency, poor health outcomes and many literally die of hunger and or diseases.

Oh yes, this renewal we long for will reflect an economy of sufficiency and sustainability which mitigates poverty, inequality, preserves the ecology and promotes justice and peace. The world is facing a moral and ethical crisis as values grounded in the gospel such as love of neighbour gets scoffed at depending on who is the neighbour. Much is sacrificed on the altar of political expediency.

Believers', there is need for SUSTAINED RESISTANCE through our prophetic proclamation. What appears to be the intentional dismantling of gains of the civil rights and other justice movements, should not go unnoticed. Radical renewal requires sustained resistance through the church's prophetic proclamation that God is making all things.

In the face of persecution and exclusion, marginalization and oppression, the voice of the church must be heard loud and clear, not as co-opted agents of the state. The present order is not meant to be abandoned to the powers who falsely claim possession of it.

The fusion of certain world views and identity, increasingly referred to as Christian Nationalism in some places, is on the rise and must not go unchallenged. The Church should

not accept civil religion, treating leaders as worthy of godlike status, just to get along. This radical renewal is an invitation to exercise openness to what God is doing 500 years along.

Radical Renewal requires sustained resistance to the ills that undermine human flourishing, and the church should not remain silent at such a time as this. We should not be complicit, complacent or compromised. Radical Renewal requires Sustained Resistance for the liberation of humanity and the rest of creation under the Lordship of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **SELF-GIVING SOLIDARITY**

Radical Renewal requires not only Sustained Resistance but Self-giving solidarity, a solidarity which works itself out in at least two ways; through hospitality and unity.

It involves taking sides with those who are intimidated, threatened, victimized, sanctioned and oppressed by the powers and systems, institutions and ideologies.

Many of us know what it means to be aliens, immigrants, exiled, persecuted and excluded and therefore one of the strongest expressions of solidarity we need to embrace fully, is the practice of Christian Hospitality.

The church should practice self-giving solidarity as Jesus did throughout his life and ministry, welcoming the stranger and those in need of safety and security. Can I say, that hospitality is different from surface level expressions of ‘welcoming the guests. It requires making space around the table, creating possibilities for meaningful relationships of mutuality.

Self-Giving Solidarity requires influencing and supporting legislations and policies that support minorities and vulnerable people. We cannot afford to embrace nationalism that is so exclusive that people are objectified, categorized, dehumanized and isolated.

Self-Giving solidarity should be the posture of the whole church, an ecumenical enterprise in which bridges are built for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which transcends traditions and denominational affiliations.

The fellowship of God’s people reflecting the unity of Christ is a part of the outworking of this new order. Yes, the old divisions and distance which prevent us from being in full communion one with another will be eroded as we create bonds of solidarity in Christ. The church’s witness should be of such that our oneness in Christ is evident through our solidarity in the embrace of the common vision of a new heaven and earth. This self-giving solidarity is redemptive because we make ourselves available to be instruments of God, mindful of the redemptive power and presence of God through Jesus the Christ which cuts across all divides and makes healing and renewal possible.

### **SUPREME SOVEREIGNTY**

Our text locates the outcome of history, humanity, the rest of creation, life and destiny with a Sovereign God. As a result of God’s sovereignty, we can maintain a dynamic, defiant hope, confident in the promises of God in Christ. All is brought to judgement before God as God’s ultimate will and purpose for the world triumphs over all.

Because God is Sovereign, in whom all power and authority lies, there will come a time when the sea, death, night will be no more... Enemies of overwhelming might and power, chaos, and disorder will be swept away by God's power. There will be "no more night, no more pain, no more tears no more crying again...we will live in the light of the risen lamb".

Yes, oppressive, exploitative exercise of power against the powerless that oppose God and diminish life will not last forever. God is sovereign in a world where the powers are on the rise, in ways that are death dealing and life denying. But let us not forget that every institution, system, power and authority ebbs and flows and in fact some literally fall. "Babylon the great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed" and we can cite examples of many others. Several empires of the past are no longer, they are but a shell of what they used to be for that which is immoral and unethical cannot stand.

Yes, in this new dispensation, the unfolding renewal, the capacity to create fear, anxiety and disorder in exercise of their power will be no more. There is coming a day when God will manifest God's self among us such that our selfish attentions will be refocused and our lives reordered. Our text reminds us, "the home of God is among mortals, he will be with them". The one who is seated on the throne declares... "see I am making all things new". God's intended will and purpose for the benefit of Human well-being and flourishing in community will not be frustrated but will triumph. The transformation we live and long for is possible because of the Sovereignty of God who is supreme.

We can live in and proclaim this confident hope, that because of God's Sovereignty all that has been promised will be realized. The vision of the New Order to come, sets the agenda for the present where God's will is done on earth.

In closing let us reaffirm that we cannot abandon the present order to the powers, instead we need to be living and witnessing to the alternative, that is; justice, righteousness, peace, neighbourliness and love. This is possible because we live knowing that the one who has begun a good work in us will see it to completion (Phil 1:6).

This renewal will be undertaken through sustained resistance, self-giving solidarity; working together for a more just order here and now and acknowledging the sovereignty of God as the basis of all action, the grounding of resistance solidarity. May we avail ourselves to be used as instruments of God, in whom we continue to hope and trust as enabled by the Holy Spirit. Amen.