



Easter 5

THE NEW SHOFAR

What truly matters is obeying God

A new creations happens through our inner-Christ

In Christ we live in a new heaven and a new earth – today! Now!

The Book of Revelation is one of the more difficult Books in our Bible. The language is strange, the style is puzzling and the message often appears to be contrary to what we find on the lips of Jesus. All of this without even mentioning beasts, angels, battles and the appearances of demons. However, as one great German commentator noted – this apocalyptic language is the “mother of theology”. Mother might be weird, but she is telling believers something quite profound.

John was writing at a time of great distress for the Church. There were martyrdoms, persecutions, exiles, tortures and an almost unending list of sufferings being poured out on the fledgling Church. It was a time of testing. A time when individual and communal faith was challenged and the Christians themselves were looking for some small spark of hope in a very dark world. They wondered where the light of the Risen and Glorious Christ was actually brightening their horizons. Were the forces of darkness, evil and oppression greater than the love of God in Jesus? If they were struggling so much, was it even worth persevering?

It is not all about the future beyond death

One of the great liberating insights of John was to encourage the people to find Christ in their midst, there alongside of them as they were being slaughtered by the Romans. They had to live for the present world and not think being a disciple was all about them getting to heaven. In their suffering and death they were bringing light to darkness, proclaiming to the brutal crowds gathering for their spectacular martyrdoms how there was something more to life than the things they were seeking. Their living and dying in Christ brought something new and powerful to the world. They might not always see it or be aware of what God was doing; the fruits of their lives and their deaths may not be seen in their own generation or in their own life times but as they lived and died in Christ, the power of heaven was released in their every word and deed. That was discipleship.

John exhorts his people to believe God is transforming creation through the Christ in them, through the reality of Jesus they bring alive in the world. This happens in their living and it is proclaimed most eloquently in their dying. The crowds were stunned to hear the Christians singing *Alleluia! Alleluia!* as the lions pounced and the gladiators swung their swords. They did not understand how Christ’s followers could endure all these things without bitterness, without cursing their gods. Why would they offer forgiveness and love to those persecuting them? How could they declare *well its only death!?* It was in the way they lived and died the world encountered Christ and it was in and through these self-sacrificing disciples of Christ the world came to know, love and serve the Father.

Produced by Bishop Michael Hough for the Disciples of Christ -

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It is all about what God wills and not what I want

We know the difficulties Peter had in accepting the way God was bringing about the transformation of creation. He was a good and faithful Jew but struggled to allow the way of God to become the way of Peter. He fought tooth and nail against Jesus, even to the point of being called *Satan* by the Son of God. When the pressure was truly on him and he had to decide between Jesus and himself, he turned and walked away from his master.

In today's reading we see the same Peter but this time a Peter who is reaching out to God in trust and in hope. He is being asked to abandon one of the hallmarks of Judaism – clean and unclean food. This goes to the heart of the sacrificial system of the Temple and no faithful Jew would consider eating unclean food. Imagine his pain, his uncertainty when he is told what he thinks is God's will is nothing other than what Peter prefers. Whatever God was doing in the past when handing down the Law to Moses and the people, God, in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus is doing new things in a transformed world. What mattered previously is not necessarily going to be of help in the work of God in the present and future as the Gentiles are invited to participate in salvation. It is not that God is changing the divine mind. God is now working in a new era, working through a reconstituted Israel, through the community of Christ's disciples and Peter is being asked to take the big risk of trusting God. Sometimes? Occasionally? Often...God calls upon believers to collaborate in his saving works, collaborate in ways that we do not understand, with which we can be uncomfortable, uncertain, confused and even afraid. In the past this has proved to be too much for Peter and he has walked away. Not this time. After Easter things have changed and the world is now a different place.

What matters is not what Peter wants or feels the world needs. It is not about what he and the others feel they can manage and are up to taking on. Peter has finally discovered what all human life is about – obeying God. It is about living according to the way we were created, in line with the divine plan not only for ourselves but for the whole of creation. If God is asking us to eat what we have long considered to be *unclean* [and whatever that might mean in our own world today and in the world of our own parishes and families] then we eat it. Obedience is the Way of Discipleship and that life of obedience is modelled for us in Jesus the Son of God. And it may cost us our lives.

The new heaven and the new earth has come down from heaven!

The Book of Revelation keeps readers' eyes fixed on the present world, the transformation of that part of the world in which each and every believer lives and dies. While he reassures his Church of the future glory awaiting those who persevere in faith (and this is a major theme) his real focus is on being in the world as channels of divine grace. St Francis of Assisi understood this and so his prayer became...*Lord make me a channel of your peace...let me sow love...be a source of pardon and forgiveness, a beacon of hope, a witness to the power of faith, someone who brings light to others, joy to those who are sad.* He prays that he and all followers of Jesus *console those who mourn, understand those who feel lost and isolated and love unconditionally those who know not the peace and joy of being loved.* See all of those verbs! This is the new creation of which the Bible speaks and it is new creation, a transformed world that comes about through our inner-Christ reaching out through our every word and deed. The recent elections are not going to change the world - but we can. Or rather, God is -if and when we allow ourselves to be the true channels of God...for others.

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