

Easter 7C May 8, 2016

**NEW LIFE**  
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Our text for today is Revelation 22:17:

The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.'  
And let everyone who hears say, 'Come.'  
And let everyone who is thirsty come.  
Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.

One chapter earlier in Revelation, in the passage about the new heaven and the new earth that we often hear read at funerals, Jesus says, "See, I am making all things new."

That's what is happening here at Atonement Lutheran Church, located on planet Earth at 42.5 degrees North of the equator and 89.02 degrees West of the Prime Meridian. Here in this place, God is calling us to something new. The old has passed away; our lives are being made new, as Paul says in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5. Can you feel it? Here, in this place, God is making all things new.

In embracing that newness lies the hope of this congregation. And what do we know about hope? Hope is not a wish; hope is the confidence that God's promises are true. And hope does not disappoint, as we know from Romans 5, because God's love is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

During the height of the fight against Apartheid in South Africa, someone asked Archbishop Desmond Tutu if he were "optimistic" about the chances of a nonviolent movement succeeding in getting Nelson Mandela released from prison and blacks the vote.

"What do I have to be optimistic about?" Tutu replied. Then he added, "But I believe we will succeed. I am a prisoner of hope." He was echoing words from the prophet Zechariah (9:12): "Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double."

Christian hope is to live with confidence in newness and fullness of life, and to await the coming of Christ in glory, and the completion of God's purpose for the world.

Atonement Lutheran Church has a long and proud history. Every one of you here today has played a big part in the caretaking of this church, its building and its traditions. You have seen many pastors come and go; some have departed routinely, others tragically. You have seen people join and, especially in recent years, you have seen them leave. But here, in this place, God is making all things new.

Verses 16 and 17 of Revelation 22 tell us exactly what this newness looks like. Verse 16 makes it clear that Jesus is at the head: "It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.

And Verse 17 tells us exactly what we are to do.  
The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.'  
And let everyone who hears say, 'Come.'  
And let everyone who is thirsty come.  
Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.

What does this mean to us, to the people of Atonement?

*The Spirit and the bride say, "Come."* With the power of the Holy Spirit, we open our doors onto the world and extend the invitation to all people to come in.

*And let everyone who hears say, "Come."* Those people, in turn, invite others in because they felt welcomed, nourished and sustained.

*And let everyone who is thirsty come.* Our invitation isn't just for people who look like us, but for all the world. All God's children are thirsty for the words of life, for healing, for hope in the face of economic setbacks, for the assurance that Jesus is right beside us at all times and loves us more than we can imagine. And we are not alone, for Jesus is praying to his Father that we can all be brought together. We just heard these very words in the gospel reading from John 17:

<sup>22</sup>The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, <sup>23</sup>I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Finally, verse 17 of Revelation 22 says: *Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.* God's mercy and forgiveness comes to us through water and word as a free gift, no matter who you are, where you have been, or what you have done. This is grace! So we call to the world, "Come here and be baptized! Come here, be fed and strengthened in faith, week after

week, as you receive the body and blood of our crucified and risen Lord! Come here and become a new person in Christ!

Here at Atonement Lutheran Church, we are people of hope. Perhaps you recall the words of one of our great Lutheran hymns, "Jesus Lives, My Sure Defense," in whose first stanza we sing:

"Jesus lives, my sure defense and my everlasting Savior!  
Knowing this, my confidence rests in hope and will not waver,  
though the night be fraught still with many an anxious thought."

I know you have many anxious thoughts. But now is not a time to think about what has been or even what is, for God is making all things new. And as we turn toward our neighbors to share the message of salvation by grace through faith alone, we will find that we, too, are born anew every day.

This is good news for God's people. Amen!