

“Alpha and Omega”

Liturgical Date: Last Sunday of the Church Year (Proper 29 B)

Primary Text: Revelation 1:4-8

Grace be unto you, and peace, from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come. The primary text for today, the Last Sunday of the Church Year, is the Epistle lesson from the first chapter of Revelation. The title of today’s sermon is “Alpha and Omega”. THE TRIUNE GOD HAS NO BEGINNING NOR END, SO ALL WHOM HE HAS CALLED BY THE GOSPEL WILL LIVE IN HIS ETERNAL KINGDOM.

Most people speak about things being eternal all the time. When you are driving somewhere around Atlanta and you see red taillights as far as the eye can see you say, “This is going to take forever.” You check in at the DMV and see a room full of people and think, “I am going to be in here for an eternity.” Someone goes into a place of business and sees a long time employee and turns to a friend and says, “This person has always worked here.” Olive Garden offers “never ending pasta bowls.” Willy Wonka candy has the “everlasting gobstopper.” But when we say or hear these things we know it is hyperbole-using an extreme exaggeration to make a point. Frustrating as it may be, we know that we will not really be sitting in our cars in traffic for all time-it is a figure of speech.

We heard in our Epistle Reading today in verse 8 that God says, “*I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending*”. Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and Omega is the last letter-you see this two letters on your bulletin cover and they appear often in Christian imagery. And furthermore this means that God has no beginning or end-and this is no hyperbole, but literal truth. One of the foundational understandings of

Christianity is that everything is created and nothing really lasts forever- despite what Willa Wonka may tell you. The only “thing” that is eternal is actually a “whom”-the Triune God.

One of the most common questions that children, and some adults, ask is “Who made God?” The short answer to this question is “no one.” How is this possible? Well this is one of those questions that our finite human minds cannot comprehend fully and some people have difficulty with it because they can’t move from thinking outside of parameters of what we see around us. But we can use an example from science to help us begin to understand this. Scientists believe that the universe is expanding, thus space has no end. There is not some kind of cosmic brick wall out there with a big sign that says, “The end.” Scientists have taken observable data and concluded that space is expanding, and although they can’t actually see all points of space, this is believed. In a similar manner we know that all things in creation must have a creator by virtue of the fact that we observe them existing. There would have to be something that existed before everything else to create the first thing-and this is God. Time itself is actually a dimension created by God. It is a very useful thing for us, but God dwells outside of time and space.

The Bible clearly teaches that God has no beginning or end. Hebrews 13:8 states that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. We see the eternal nature of God in our readings for today. Psalm 93 uses phrases, “never be moved” (v1), “everlasting” (v2), and “forevermore” (v5). Isaiah speaks of the heavens and earth vanishing like smoke and wearing out like an old piece of clothing, but then says, “*but my salvation shall be for ever; and my righteousness shall not be abolished.*” (v6) Jesus tells Pilate in the Gospel from St. John 18 that His Kingdom is not like the kingdoms of the

world. The kingdoms and kings of the world rise and fall, as only a kingdom that is not of this world could be eternal. Of course the Epistle reading from Revelation drives the eternal nature of God home. It says in verses 4 and 8 that the Lord, “*which is, which was, and which is to come.*” Glory and dominion are to Him for ever and ever (v6). He is Alpha and Omega, uncreated, un-bound by time, the beginning and end of all things.

This is the Last Sunday of the Church Year. During the last few weeks of the Church Year, as well as in the first few weeks known as Advent the Bible readings and liturgical focus is on the End Times. We hear about and look toward the Return of Jesus Christ. We hear of the signs and events that build up to the Final Judgment on the Last Day and some of those events can lead to fears when we hear of wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution, and the wrath of God being poured out.

And the first thing that many people think of when they think of the End Times is the last book of the Bible, Revelation. While the End Times and Last Days are discussed throughout the Scripture, Revelation certainly contains prophecy and descriptions of the culmination of human history. But Revelation is often misunderstood and misapplied. People search through its passages with news articles and history books in hand like a sleuth searching for clues that they can tie into world events and along the way often construct timelines and charts-some of which are very complex. For many this book is the “Revelations of Future Events.”

In viewing this book of the Bible in this manner, it becomes easy to miss the “forest for the trees”. While there are parts of Revelation that are hard to figure out exactly what is meant, as evidenced by the variety of theories that different Christians have formulated over the years, it may come as a surprise that the main message of Revelation is actually very plain

and clear. OK then, what is pastor? We actually see the answer in our short selection from Revelation Chapter 1 today, but you really don't have to look further than the title of the book to know its main meaning.

Revelation is the English translation of the Greek World *apocalypse*, which literally means an “uncovering” or “unveiling”. So what is being uncovered? It is actually a “who”. Although it is often called “Revelations”, the title of this book is singular “Revelation.” Many Bibles will include full title of the Book. It is not “Revelations of the End Times”, but “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.” That’s right: Revelation, like the Bible as a whole, is a book about Jesus. It is about Jesus being revealed in all His power and glory when He returns. It can be interesting to study the different theories, but the bottom line is that to be prepared for the return of Christ we need not have the correct timeline or match each current event correctly with a prophecy. We need to know Jesus!

And our Epistle text for today gets right to the heart of the meaning of this book and why it is important. Paul Kretzmann wrote of this passage, *“This paragraph strikes the keynote of the entire book, its sentences moving forward with majestic grandeur.”* We see several themes that recur over and over again introduced. We see the number 7 (churches and spirits, v4). Seven is the number of perfection and many things come in sevens in Revelation. There is an emphasis on blood, as blood of Jesus washes us clean from sin (v5). The glory of God is on full display in its power and majesty in Revelation (v6). Finally, the book continually speaks toward and at the end describes the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Right here in verse 7 we are told key things that we need to know about it. He will return with clouds, just as the angels told the Disciples (including the human author of Revelation, John) that He would at the Ascension. Every eye will see His

return-both those that are made righteous through faith in Him and those that have rejected Him. We need not worry about some “secret” rapture or stealth return. When Jesus comes back it will be obvious and no one will be able to avoid it, even if they wanted to.

There is so much in this passage that is linked into other passages of the Bible, both Old and New Testament. It can be richly mined for truth. But I want to focus on just a couple of things before the sermon concludes. They relate to Jesus as we have seen this is what Revelation is about. The Father is eternal, but so is the Son as we see the “Alpha and Omega” referring to Jesus specifically in the last two chapters.

Take a look at verse 5 again, *“And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, washed us from our sins in his own blood.”* Is this verse not a great summary of the Gospel? Our sins have separated us from God. But rather than leaving us abandoned, far off from His grace, God came to us in the flesh-this is what we joyfully celebrate especially in the Christmas season. The Son of God became man, born of a woman, under the Law, and would live and die for us. God had breath, a voice box, and a mouth that literally spoke the life-giving Gospel to people who heard with real ears as He walked and lived among us. Jesus is the faithful witness. Notice how this ties in to what Jesus answers to Pilate’s question if He was a king. From verse 37 of John 18, *“To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone one that is of the truth heareth my voice.”*

When we hear the voice of Jesus, today as His Word is read and proclaimed, we hear the very voice of God. We hear the truth. We hear that the blood of Jesus has washed away our many sins. We hear the love and

grace of our heavenly Father. We hear the Gospel and the Holy Spirit works faith. We hear His promise that He will return. We will judge rightly and restore our fallen world to its intended state. This is good news! This is news that only the Alpha and Omega can deliver! Again from Kretzmann, *“This is the great comfort of believers, the certain foundation upon which our faith rests.”*

Do we know the exact time and date of His return? Of course not. Jesus said as much. He will return as “a thief in the night”. The trumpet will sound. The clouds will descend. The glory of God will encompass the earth. So we are to be ready. We are to be prepared. We are to tell others of His saving message. And when we know and have Jesus, the Alpha and Omega-the beginning and end of all things-we are prepared.

I leave with these words from Revelation 1:3 which are found right before our assigned reading for today, *“Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”*

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.