

## **“Making All Things New”**

**Revelation 21:1-6**

**Fifth Sunday after Easter: May 2, 2010**

**A sermon preached by The Rev. Dr. Ivan H.M. Peden  
MUMC, Thomasville, NC**

**Copyright: 2010, I. Peden**

---

The book of Revelation was written when to be a Christian was to risk losing employment, home, family, even life itself. Times were hard for the first followers of Christ. There was a very real danger that the tiny fledgling churches in Asia Minor might be wiped out by Roman persecution, and it seems that God gave this book of Revelation to the early church to provide them with a vision to keep going.

“Behold, I am making all things new.” What a glorious process and promise we may choose to be part of with God! These words were especially glorious to those persecuted Christians – the first to hear the words of Revelation 21. Their lives were in constant danger because they refused to deny Christ and bow the knee to Caesar.

One cannot begin to imagine what those early Christians felt when they heard these words read to them: “Behold, I am making all things new.” “I saw a new heaven and a new earth.” There is very little revealed about the character of the new heaven and earth in Scripture. The main emphasis is its uniqueness; it is quite different from the old. The new heaven and earth is not simply the old that have been renovated, but an act of new creation which describes the dissolving of the old heaven and earth. The word “new” here is *kainos* which means “fresh, new in quality and character.” Further, in the original text the words “heaven” and “earth” are without the article stressing this aspect of quality rather than identity.

Who doesn’t want a better quality of life? To those first Christians the notion that the old would disappear and be replaced by a radical newness – a quality of life not known in many years, their liberation from bondage to Rome, and the establishment of their right to express their faith in Christ freely – such a notion of a radically new dispensation was encouraging, appealing, and inspiring. They longed for a new beginning that would remove the threat of Roman oppression.

God is a God of New Beginnings. The people in Old Testament days and the early followers of Christ served a God of New Beginnings. We, too, serve such a God. The Bible presents a story that is full of beginnings. Again and again, God allows God’s people to have

new beginnings: Noah builds an ark and he and his family are saved – a new beginning; Abraham is chosen to be the leader of a special people – a new relationship with humanity begins again; God sends God’s people who have become slaves in Egypt a rescuer, Moses, through whom they are freed from bondage and brought into the Promised Land – another new beginning. In John’s gospel we read that “in the fullness of time,” God sends a redeemer to bring the good news of another “new beginning,” one that would offer salvation for all and eternal life through Jesus, the Christ.

Finally, at the end of history, things will not really *end* at all. In fact, we are told in Revelation 21 – while we are moving inexorably and inevitably toward the last days – that God is making all things new. We read that there will be “a new heaven and a new earth.” No more tears, no more pain, no more death. “Behold, I am making all things new.” Over and over, in the midst of our waywardness, in the midst of our wandering, in the midst of our fear, in the midst of our failure, this God of New Beginnings begins again and again *and again* with us!

Is it not true that there is something about us that looks forward to new beginnings? The plaintive plea, “Give me another chance, please, just one more chance,” resonates through our individual and collective souls. The good news is that God meets us at that point of anticipation of another chance ...the anticipation of something new. As I said, we serve a God of New Beginnings. That is not the first time that I have said that from this pulpit since coming here nearly three years ago.

God said: “Behold, I am making all things new” at Memorial, and it is true. It has been happening. We can recognize this newness ...just look around ...notice the growth of our ministry to children and young families (symbolized most recently by our brand new children’s playground), the sending forth of two members into the ordained ministry, the Angel Food Ministry outreach in our community, the expansion of our music department and coming of four music scholars among us, new means of communication with the LED sign and an enhanced website, a deepening awareness of becoming a more (not less) inclusive church family, an increasing emphasis on building and medical mission teams, the care and nurture of our senior members, a five year vision of becoming the kind of church God wants us to be, an emphasis on Memorial as a servant church in Thomasville, the development of strong community partners such as Cooperative Community Ministries, Communities In Schools,

American Red Cross, Boy Scout and Girls Scout Troops, Relay for Life, Thomasville City and Davidson County Schools, and a renewed emphasis on following up visitors and attracting new members. But that still has been the past ...albeit the recent past ...but what of the future?

I wonder if we will ever begin to fathom the implications of the dynamic action of this God of New Beginnings. One thing is clear to me ...as much as we humans love to glorify the past, when God declares "I am making all things new," then God means that God is more concerned with the future than the past, and that is true in God's dealings with us as individuals and as a body of Christ's followers. Let me repeat that point: **the God of New Beginnings is more concerned about our future than our past.** That is *good news! Incredible good news!*

The story of the gospel is that God, in Jesus, is making all things new. Jesus can take our past, whatever it is, and replace it with a new purpose, a new direction, and a new outcome. Jesus can take our sin, however great, and remove it, making us clean, making us new. Jesus can take our lives, in our youth or in our advancing years, and instill within us a new resolve, a true desire, and a Christ-centered purpose.

Can you feel a resurgence of something new that is starting again here at Memorial ...something that will be growing and building into the future? I hope so. Author, Loren Meade, in a book entitled, *The Once and Future Church*, declares: "God is always calling us **to be more than we have been,**" so, let me remind you that even now God is making all things new at Memorial.

As I have come to know and love Memorial these past three years, I would say that there are at least three areas where Memorial can be more than it has been ...three opportunities that to me appear evident on the horizon as this church with its great past and rich heritage moves forward, hopefully always in step with the leading of God's spirit. First, there are new opportunities ...there are more opportunities than ever before ...*for evangelism and church growth*; second, there is the opportunity *to be more open to continuing changes in the way Memorial's mission is understood* in an ever-changing environment in Thomasville; and third, there is the opportunity for Memorial *to increase its emphasis on accepting, including and nurturing all God's people* in this church family.

"Behold, I am making all things new." Opportunities - evangelism and church growth, a new understanding of changes in our mission, and an increasing emphasis on accepting,

including and nurturing *all* God's people – those are at least three areas that I suggest will need more energy, more resources, and extra careful planning as Memorial moves into the future. And notice that they are all related: new people will be *most* attracted to those churches that evidence a sense of mission beyond their four walls and at the same time offer a sense of belonging and inclusiveness within their walls. Being Christian means being involved in the world Christ came to save. Being Christian also means learning to belong to one another as we accept and love one another unconditionally, as we bear one another's burdens, as we laugh together, as we cry together, as we worship together, as we study together, and as we share our faith in Christ. Let us take seriously the fact that God is continually calling us to be more than we have been.

Jesus once told a story about a wineskin which had a hole, and he pointed out that you can't put a new piece on it without it tearing. We can't have the old and the new. We have to choose either one or the other. We can't have both. So, please hear me carefully this morning: We can celebrate and build on the past ...and what a rich heritage we have at Memorial ...but we can't keep and cling to the old or former ways of being the church ...not here on Randolph Street ...not anywhere in the world.

"Behold, I am making all things new." Two questions are being posed by the text in Revelation chapter 21: Will we, as individuals and as the body of Christ hang back and want to stay with the old? Or will we catch a vision, like John, of a new heaven and earth, and take a risk and move on with the new?

God will never coerce us to accept the new. We will need to make a choice. Even now God is saying to us: "Behold, I *am* making all things new." May God give each one of us courage and faith to choose to leave the old and to move on to the *new* for we worship *the God of New Beginnings*.

*This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.* This is a day of new beginnings! ***God help us to be more than we have ever been!***

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

AMEN.