

“No More,” Rev 21:1-6; John 11:32; All Saints Day; 11-1-09

No more pain, no more crying, and no more death. Everything will be made new; the old is gone and the new is come.

These days, all we hear is nothing but sad and gloomy news. They say the recession is over but things never seem to be better.

Last Tuesday, we had a representative from the Berkeley Food and Housing Project and she said that almost 7,000 people are sleeping on the streets every night in Richmond and Oakland alone.

And they say more than 2,000 families will come to the Alameda County Food Bank as they struggle to put food on their table this year.

But that is just local. We have more problems nationally and globally.

Wars continue and there are suicide bombings.

And what do you mean by No More Pain and No More Crying?

“No more pain and no more crying” is not a song title or a name of video on YouTube. It is what we hear from the Revelation lesson today.

We don’t know how that happened. But John says he saw a vision, a vision from God. And in that vision, he says he saw “a new heaven and a new earth.”

And he goes on to say, “The first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.”

New heaven and new earth; and there will be no sea.

What is he talking about?

In the ancient world, sea meant chaos. If you read Genesis 1, before there was creation, there was sea; that means there was chaos; there was nothing but chaos. No one likes chaos; chaos means no order; it means a state of confusion; it means uncertainty.

But it was God who put an end to the chaos; we call it creation. Chaos

is over; order is in place in the universe.

Then, what does that mean when our text says “There will be No More Sea and No More Crying and No More Pain?”

Well, it is an *apocalyptic* vision; in other words, it is a promise given by God to those suffering Christians in an extreme political situation.

Then, did it really happen afterward?

Answer is: Yes and No.

Historically speaking, it didn't happen. In other words, people's suffering didn't really stop; as a matter of fact, people continued to be killed and persecuted.

There were many people crying; there were many mourning; there were many pains.

But, existentially or spiritually, the Christian community became much stronger.

After seeing this vision, John may have returned to reality; and he may have seen nothing new; Roman Empire was still in operation; evil powers were still around; Christians were still beaten and killed.

But, they could see things in a different light; they could see that help was on the way; to them, heaven was not something far away; it was rather getting closer; as John says, the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, was coming down out of heaven; to them, God was closer than ever before; they could feel God's presence right in their midst.

So they were not afraid any longer; many people happily gave their lives.

We don't know what happened to John. But we have a story of one of his disciples.

His name was Polycap. Polycap was one of the martyrs in the second century. He was put to death by fire and sword for his faith.

By the time the book of Revelation was written, emperor-worship was mandatory. Caesar was a god everyone had to worship.

But Polycarp and his church people resisted.

So one day, they came and arrested Polycarp. And they asked one simple question:

"Hey, what harm is it to say Lord Caesar?"

"Just say once that you deny Jesus; your life will be spared."

And Polycarp's answer was: "Eighty and six years have I served Him and He never did me any harm; how then can I deny my King and my Savior, who has saved me?"

"Bring on the beasts, or the fire, or whatever you may choose: you shall not, by either of them, move me to deny Christ, my Lord and Savior."

To those early Christians like Polycarp, God was just not an idea or an illusion; to them, God was real; religion was real; the promise of God was so real and vivid that even the threat of death could not change their faith.

Life is tough.

Challenges are just enormous.

There are so many uncertainties in our lives.

People are crying; the world is a mess; we are just overwhelmed by all the stories of violence every day.

But remember this is a voice we need to hear from today's text.

And the voice says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the End."

That means, God is in charge; God still is.

Today, we are observing All Saints Sunday.

That means that we are not here by ourselves; we are worshiping God with our saints, big saints and small saints, who have gone ahead of us.

There were big names like Peter, Paul, John, and Polycarp.... A cloud of witnesses who gave their lives to Christ... we cannot even count the number.

But there were also many small saints.

Our loved ones who used to sit here with you together in this very place are also saints.

They are here with us in spirit; and I hear them say that what we see with our physical eyes are not all.

I hear them say to me in one voice: "The God who said there would be No More death or no mourning or crying or pain was right. The God who said I would wipe away every tear from your eyes was correct."

"Folks at Albany UMC, Stay in faith; keep up the good work; it is not going to be that long; we will see you soon.

"The old order of things has passed away; things down there may be still the same; but everything is new here."

So brothers and sisters, let's open eyes and look beyond.

At the end of this service, I know, things may look the same. You may still see many kinds of beasts that are going around every corner of your life.

But those who trust in the One who said "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end" will find peace and comfort.

As long as we stay in faith, there is nothing that will separate us from God's love;

as St. Paul said, neither death nor evil powers, nor anything else in the world, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So, let's stay in faith; pain will be no more; crying will be no more.

The love of God is always with us;

The presence of God is always with us.

Amen.