

The Fifth Sunday of Easter

April 28, 2013

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Russell Wilke III

Revelation 21:1-6 – Easter 5

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. (NIV)

Have you ever felt out of place and I mean really out of place? You look around and you think to yourself “*I don’t belong here.*” You feel you don’t fit in; like you are not supposed to be there. When I was at the seminary three of my classmates and I were able to go out to this beautiful, very expensive golf course called “*The Bog.*” I can’t remember if we won a free round of golf in a previous scramble or were given it as a gift. But I remember driving onto this course and immediately there were people waiting to park your car, take your clubs, and escort you into the clubhouse. I looked around the parking lot and saw Cadillac’s and Lexus’s, but not any other 1989 Chrysler Lebaron’s, and certainly not one where you could hear the muffler coming from a few bocks away. I sheepishly handed over my keys to the valet driver to park it.

And then when we checked in at the clubhouse they gave us a bucket of balls to hit on the driving range. I looked at these Nike golf balls and these range balls were better than the ones in my bag I’d actually be playing. As we hit the range employees came over and started to clean my clubs and I was kind of embarrassed as I doubt they cleaned off too many sets of *Dunlop* woods and *Tommy Aaron* irons, especially ones with two to three years of dirt still on them. While out on the course I looked around at the other golfers and noticed how they were dressed. I’ll just put it this way – I think I was the only one wearing golf shorts from Walmart. After the round again employees stood ready to clean your clubs and your shoes and escort you back to your car. Please don’t get me wrong I’m not saying I didn’t enjoy golfing there but I did feel out of place. I felt like I did not fit in – I had thoughts that I did not belong there.

That is how I feel sometimes when I read some of these awesome revelations of heaven the Lord Jesus allows the apostle John to see and record for us. There is this description about this Holy City coming down out of heaven, of a place with streets of gold and filled with priceless treasures, this home where God dwells with His people and where nothing bad ever happens, this breathtaking scene filled with people dressed in splendid white robes and enjoying eternal pleasures. As I read over these awesome visions I can’t help but think “*I don’t belong here.*”

Do you ever listen to these magnificent descriptions of heaven and think that you do not fit in at such a place? If you do that is alright because the truth is if left to ourselves we don't belong here. We also understand why we feel out of place as we view glimpses of this amazing heaven. It is because of our sin. I think of how I have disobeyed my God's commands more times than I could ever begin to count. I remember the things I fail to do which God has rightly asked of me. Perhaps we think about our lack of love for God and others that is far too evident in our lives, and this glorious home doesn't seem like a place where we belong. But today our Lord comes to us with this good news of His Word to tell us just the opposite. Heaven is where we belong. Heaven is our home. This is where God wants you and me to be in the end. The wonderful truth actually is this: **Heaven is where we fit in as Jesus makes everything new!**

Remember again that these revelations were given to the apostle John as he was exiled on the island of Patmos. These were revelations given to comfort John and all the Church of God as they point again and again to the victory Jesus has won. There were seven revelations given and this last is perhaps the most magnificent. "***Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.***" What John gets to see is a vision of heaven. The Day will come when the world as we know it will pass away and now John gets a glimpse of the new heaven and new earth. "***There was no longer any sea.***" Some believe the sea refers to the whole world which will be destroyed on Judgment Day. Others think it means all the water we have now won't be needed. Or perhaps (and this is the explanation I prefer) that there is no longer any sea refers to the fact that in this new place there will be no more fear or danger. Back in that day that is what the sea represented – it was a source of danger and separation.

The vision continues: "***I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.***" What John sees next is the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints. He sees God's people, all believers coming down out of heaven. There is a key here in this verse of why we will fit in heaven. John describes the Church as being prepared and being beautifully dressed – like a bride for her husband. This preparation is clearly a gift. Christ has prepared and made them beautiful by washing them through water and the Word in baptism so that they could be presented holy and blameless in His sight.

As John was watching this he heard something. It was a loud voice. Listen carefully to what it says: "***And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'***" I don't know about you but all that sounds pretty good to me. I think I would enjoy living in such a place. Heaven is so wonderful and marvelous that any words I try to use to describe will come up far short. I've always loved what Martin Luther said about heaven. He says for us to talk about what heaven is like would be like twin babies trying to discuss what life will be like outside their mother's womb. We just won't know until we get there. That is why this awesome place is described more in terms of what is not there – no pain, no sorrow, no crying or death. It is a place where our God will wipe away our every tear – a home with God Himself.

Again do we ever picture these visions of heaven and think to ourselves: *"I don't belong here?"* I wonder if the apostle John had his doubts about what was going to happen to him as he sat alone in exile. When we look at our sins and what we deserve we have to admit we don't belong in a place like heaven. That's why we need Jesus! Only Jesus makes us fit for heaven. He did so by providing each one of us the righteousness we need by His perfect life. Jesus made you fit for heaven when all your sins were nailed to the cross with Him and Jesus died for them. Because of Jesus we are fit for this new heaven and new earth John sees here, this beautiful home God is preparing for us.

When the devil attacks with accusations trying to fill our hearts and minds with doubts, trying to tell us heaven is not for us, that we will never fit in, that God could not ever love someone like us, I pray we turn to Jesus and listen again to His Word. ***"He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!'"*** Then he said, ***"Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."*** Jesus will take us out of this world of sin and bring us into a perfect home of righteousness. No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind can conceive of how great this new home will be where we will dwell forever. How sure can we be of this? These words are as true and trustworthy as Jesus' grave is empty!

As many of you know last weekend I went to see my Grandpa when I heard the word that he will soon be with his Savior. Last Saturday my dad read a devotion on the Word of God where Jesus talks about the many rooms or mansions in heaven. Jesus promises to go there and prepare one for each of his disciples and then will come back to take them to be with Him. When the devotion was over my dad asked my grandpa *"Did Jesus prepare one for you and are you going to your mansion?"* My Grandpa simply said *"Yep, I'm going."* He is fit for heaven. This is not some pie in the sky dream or some arrogant claim. My Grandpa knows very well that on his own he is not worthy. But He understands Jesus has made him worthy. Jesus has prepared him and dressed him beautifully as a bride who is now waiting for the groom to come.

I pray that each of us have the same confidence not only in life, but in death. I pray each of us boldly confesses *"Yep, I'm going."* We belong in this place with all the saints and angels. We belong with God forever. We are supposed to go where sin, sorrow, and death will never touch us again. Why? ***"It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life."*** Yes, with His life, death, and resurrection Jesus has already paid the way! Heaven is our home that is absolutely free for us because it already cost Jesus everything. The remarkable truth now is that because of what we are in Jesus this sinful world is the place where we no longer fit in! Heaven is our home. Friends fit for heaven, rejoice, give thanks and love one another as your Savior Jesus loves you. Look forward to the day when you will look around in heaven and say *"I belong here,"* when Jesus makes everything new! Amen.