

TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
MINOCQUA, WI
SERMON FOR NOVEMBER 6-7, 2022

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, because the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. And the sea no longer existed. ² And I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

³ And from the throne I heard a loud voice that said, "Look! God's dwelling is with people. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain, because the former things have passed away."

⁵ The one who was seated on the throne said to me, "Look, I am making everything new!" He also said, "Write, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ And he said to me: It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To anyone who is thirsty, I will give freely from the spring of the water of life.
(Revelation 21:1-6 EHV)

- I can't. I can't do it. I can't fix things. I can't fix my family. I can't protect those I love. I can't stand the pain.
- I can't stop _____ (fill in the blank) – drinking, binge-eating, binge-watching, binge-spending, working too much, being jealous, being critical of others.
- I can't get enough attention, likes, hearts, recognition, affirmation.
- I can't understand what I do, for I have the desire to do what is good, but cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but instead I do the evil I do not want to do.
- I can't do it. I just can't.

But God can. And he will.

In this world, in my life and in yours, there's a lot of "I can't." Let's set our hearts on things above, let's look to where we're headed, home to heaven. Through the Apostle John's pen and the Holy Spirit's guidance, let's enjoy **A GLIMPSE OF HEAVEN**, where "can'ts" are no and more everything is good and right and new.

John the apostle is old when he writes these words. He's probably in his 90s. His body is weary. The journey has taken its toll. His friends are gone. Peter is dead. Paul, too has been martyred. Both men gone at least 30 years. None of the other original apostles are alive; only John.

And he is in exile. He's living on the Roman version of Alcatraz, the small rocky island of Patmos just off the coast of Asia Minor. From it, he can see his beloved city of Ephesus. He thinks of the Christians he served there as their pastor. He thinks of the wider church – so many were planted during Paul's journeys but are now under tremendous pressure. Worldliness, apathy, persecution, some churches even collapsing from the inside. The Christian church, his beloved church, the church of his Savior Jesus with whom he himself walked and talked, is taking it on the chin and all he can do is watch it fall to pieces.

As he hears the voice from the throne, I wonder, does he remember the day he heard it on the mountain, the mount of transfiguration? There was the Father's voice, awesome and fear-inducing: ***"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"*** (Matthew 17:5) But there too was Jesus, speaking with, incredibly, Moses and Elijah, about his upcoming final journey to the cross, then telling John and James and Peter to get up and not be afraid.

It is the same John and the same Jesus. Six decades earlier, John heard Jesus' voice on that mount and just a few months later, on another mount: Mount Calvary. There he heard Jesus speak words of anguish and forgiveness, then of finality and confidence: ***"It is finished!"*** (John 19:30) ***"Father, into your hands I commit***

my spirit." (Luke 23:46) Now, at Jesus' invitation, John looks into the future, into eternity, to see what's at the end of the journey, the destination at which all God's people will arrive. Here the Lord shows John what's on the other side of the finish line, a glimpse of heaven. John's Lord is our Lord, too, and this heaven is our home, so let's take it all in.

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, because the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. And the sea no longer existed." (v. 1) No more sea or anything else to separate God's people from each other or from God's presence. The old has gone, the new has come.

"And I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." (v. 2) Is there anything more beautiful than a bride? One of the side benefits of being a pastor is that I get an early glimpse of the bride before the service and as she stands at the beginning of the aisle. And I have to say that I have never seen an ugly bride. I've seen some grooms that could use an alteration or two, but never a bride. When you hear that our heavenly home, the destination at the end of our ultimate journey is like a new bride, doesn't it make you want to go home?

The world you and I wake up to every morning here couldn't be described as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband, could it? A teenager takes his own life. Another endures social media bullying that will scar her for life. Political leaders let us down daily, every week another church leader brings disgrace upon the name of Jesus, Christian people become more and more indistinguishable from the world around them.

It's easy to point fingers at others, but you and I carry plenty of sin and blame. Not a day goes by, not even an hour, that we do the same: let others down with our selfishness/pettiness/sin, bring disgrace upon the name of Jesus, and blend in with the hellbound, in-cahoots-with-Satan, world all around us. Left to ourselves, our destination is not a pleasant one. Hell isn't a place that garners, say a "one star rating" on a scale of 1-5; it's untold unfathomable misery for all time. It never ends. Satan doesn't even want to be there – that's how awful and eternal it is.

But God's people have a different destination thanks to God's love and grace. **"And from the throne I heard a loud voice that said, 'Look! God's dwelling is with people. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God.'"** (v. 3) He did it once already, God did, in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ – came here to be with us, to be here for us – to live and suffer and die (all of it perfectly and innocently) and then rise again. He did it one time for all time to pay the price for sin, yours/mine, and by his Spirit gave us the faith to believe this to be true and that it applies to me and to you. And there's this: he is coming back. Whether he comes for you and me at the end of all things or simply when he's determined that our time here is finished, he will take us to be with him for all eternity.

How we look forward to this! **"They will be his people...(and) God himself will be with them, and he will be their God."** But this isn't just about the future. It's the present. You have this relationship with God right now by grace. You and I look at ourselves in the mirror and we don't see the beautiful bride, but Jesus does. He says you are his bride right now. Ever since your baptism when he washed away your sins with his forgiveness he's called you his bride, **"without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."** (Ephesians 5:27) You and I look at ourselves and see how imperfect and flawed and damaged and weak we are. But when God looks at us, he sees us covered in Jesus' righteousness and forgiveness, and like a beautiful bride we're perfect in his sight. We'll see that, too, at the end of our journey in heaven.

There's more, actually "no more." Listen to these amazing words: **"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain, because the former things have passed away."** (v. 4) No more! No more tears. The same hands that stretched the heavens will touch your cheeks. The same hands that formed the mountains will caress your face. The same hands that curled in agony as the Roman spike cut through will one day cup your face and brush away your tears. Forever.

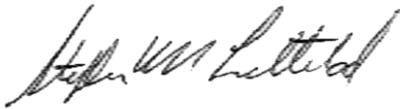
No more. No more tears. No more death. No more mourning. No more crying. No more pain. No more “can’ts” No more failure. No more waiting. No more, not ever again. No more.

One more description of our destination, one more declaration from Jesus, the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End: ***“I am making everything new!”*** (v. 5) It’s hard to see things grow old. I think back to the places I grew up, the places I’ve been. You do it too. And when you go back to those places, you see that everything gets old, wears out, gets torn down or discarded, replaced or just plain forgotten.

It’s even worse to watch people get old, to know that you and I are getting what others declare to be “old.” I’ll never forget one trip to central WI about a dozen years ago, to a little church outside Marshfield, WI where one set of grandparents are buried. My kids were amazed at all the tombstones with the name Luchterhand on them, and other assorted names that I told them were ancestors of mine, many of whom I’d never actually met. One of my girls, eyes beaming with innocence and compassion, looked up at me and said, “Daddy, I’m so sorry that so many of your relatives died.”

And they will continue to die, until Jesus brings it all to an end and says, “No more.” And so will we. But we have so much to look forward to at the end of this journey. Thanks to Jesus, who said to John and to us, ***“These words are trustworthy and true...It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To anyone who is thirsty, I will give freely from the spring of the water of life.”*** (vv. 5b,6)

I wish I could fix everything that’s wrong here, but I can’t. I can’t. You can’t. But God can. And he will. He does even now. He restores my soul. He doesn’t reform, he restores. He doesn’t camouflage the old, he restores the new. And I can’t wait for the day when Jesus will say No more! Come home! I am making everything new.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen Luchterhand". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pastor Stephen Luchterhand
Minocqua, WI