

**Revelation 21:1-6**

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; <sup>4</sup> he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." <sup>5</sup> And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." <sup>6</sup> Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

**John 13:31-35**

When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. <sup>32</sup> If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. <sup>33</sup> Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' <sup>34</sup> I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (318)

Imagine this. Close your eyes if that will help. You're feasting at the Lord's Table in glory. Death is no more. Mourning and crying and pain are no more. The first things have passed away and all is made new; partial things have passed away, now perfected, made complete. God's good purpose for creation has been fulfilled. God's power to redeem has left nothing unintelligible or unreconciled, has left nothing to waste.

So, you're feasting—spiritual yet sustaining food, nothing to die for you to live but instead (somehow!) life sustaining life, life as that bush burning though never consumed. And you're laughing—joy coming at the cost of no one, instead high-spiritedness coming as it did to Sarah who laughed whereupon she conceived of her promised son Isaac, whose name means laughter, that coming to all now filled with the Holy Spirit. And you're recognizing—all you've trusted now proven true, what you've believed now you see, what you've hoped for now is established.

Look around the table. The people you love are there. The people you long for are there. The people you've never quite connected with are there. So many strangers are all there. The whole creation, the whole of history, every experience however grand or minute—it's all there. Somehow all that is and has ever been and ever will be, all that might have been and might yet be,

*all* is realized around that table. You breathe in, understanding. You breathe out, delight and surprise.

Now here's a question: is Judas there?

"When he had gone out," the gospel reading this morning begins. "He" is Judas. The place from which he'd gone out is the upper room where Jesus was gathered with his friends for one last supper. And "out" is into the night to summon a detachment of Roman soldiers, and some police from the chief priests.

Jesus had just said, "Very truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." And when he'd given the bread to Judas Iscariot, he said to him, "Do quickly what you are about to do."

And the story is eager to note that no one at the table knew why he had said this; no one *knew* why Jesus had said this to Judas, "Do quickly what you are about to do." Some *thought* that, because Judas held the common purse, Jesus was telling him to go quickly and buy what they'd need for the festival; others *thought* he was going to give something to the poor. But that wasn't it, as we know and as they also must have suspected.

After all, Jesus would go on, from this moment after Judas had gone out, to preach to the disciples and to pray on behalf of the disciples some of the most significant things he's remembered to have said in this whole gospel. Wouldn't the disciples have noticed this? Wouldn't they have wondered at this, that Jesus sent Judas on an errand and then, though one of them was absent, got to the heart of the matter? If Judas truly was going on some Jesus-sent errand, wouldn't Jesus then wait for his return before really getting into things? What's going on here, wouldn't they have wondered? *Something's* going on here, they would at least have suspected.

Or course, it was. Something *was* going on. Satan had entered Judas—that adversarial spirit whose will it is to divide, cast aspersion, suspicion.

And now Judas would go out into the night.

How I'd like to have followed him out.

Here's how I'd have done it. I'd have snuck out so no one else would have noticed—certainly not Judas, wanting (I bet) to be alone, determined to do what he was to do; but also not the other disciples, though close by at table, yet focused as they'd been on Jesus' strange behavior of washing their feet and serving them dinner and on Jesus' strange talk of being betrayed and being denied and in this being somehow glorified, glorified.

I'd have caught the door before it sounded itself shut, and slipped into the darkness that Judas was relying on. I'd have watched for which direction he'd taken through the city, and then I'd have taken the next street over, running parallel to his path. But I'd have outpaced him, and gotten ahead of him, and then a few blocks later rejoined the street he was taking. Then I'd have sat myself down on a stoop and waited for his approach.

And when he was near, he'd have spotted me and then slowed in his tracks or come even to a wavering stop, swaying in pained ambivalence, feeling God knows what.

Was he aggrieved that Jesus fell so short of the sort of Messiah the nation really needed and Judas himself had especially hoped for—a mighty warrior, a powerful king, someone to deal to Rome what they really deserved?

Or was he enraged at the role he was coming to play. Zealous he was, yes. But he wasn't a *bad* guy, and he wasn't *the* bad guy. So why was he starting to suspect that this is how he'd be seen?

Or was he confused as to whether the compulsion to betray his friend came from within him or beyond him—or came perhaps from his friend himself? "Do quickly what you are going to do," hadn't his friend said? So, fine, he would.

Or was he proud of the fact that he alone had the courage to do what needed to be done? He'd get rid of Jesus. Jesus, provoking the empire, provoking the Sanhedrin, provoking the Temple authorities—and for what? They'd all just come down harder on the people. No, it's better for one man to die than for a whole nation to be destroyed. The high priest, Caiaphas, would say so himself.

Or was he ashamed that his envy—common, everyday envy—was about to get the better of him? Judas was zealous for his people; Jesus was indulgent of himself. Judas was entrusted with treasure and concerned for the poor; Jesus was a spendthrift. Judas hated Rome; Jesus ate with Roman tax collectors. Judas was devout; Jesus was beloved. Arrrgghh. The pain is as if your body was to begin feeding on itself.

"Judas," I'd say, and maybe this would cause him to come to himself. His name, his own name: it might have recalled to him that first call—to discipleship.

"Judas."

Meanwhile, back in that upper room, Jesus was beginning the murmurings of what would come to be called his Farewell Discourse and his High Priestly Prayer. These are unfortunate

names, hardly compelling to a potential reader or listener. But the preaching and the prayer were likely a wonder when first heard, wonderful for being both sweet and strange.

For four chapters, Jesus explains, proclaims, prays of things lovely and puzzling and sad and good. And it all begins with this, a new commandment: “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

And, of course, the fact that our reading ends here shouldn’t indicate to us that Jesus stopped speaking here, for he didn’t. No, of course, the fact that the reading ends here reflects the decision of the lectionary advisors who decide upon the readings for the church’s liturgical year, reflects their likely deciding that, with this gospel in particular, you need to keep the passages short. The Gospel of John is thick with significance. Though not as much happens as in the albeit shorter Gospel of Mark, though not as many characters come to bear as in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, the Gospel of John reverberates with meaning such that readings are best served up a few lines at a time.

As with this one—a mere five verses but weighty with Jesus’ glory, weighty with God’s glory, and the strange assertion that true glory is to be seen in Jesus on the cross. Glory!

Glory: ever wonder what that means?

*Kabod*, it is in Hebrew, meaning weight or significance. It is something approaching the awesome and the fearsome, the sort of immensity that boggles the mind. The pyramids. The statues of Easter Island. Stonehenge. The ancient Hebrew Temple. They all spur the question, “How did they that?” And then also, “Why?” Spurring also the answer that God must have been involved, either as the inspiration or the means or both. Something of such material heft that it comes to evoke or represent spiritual significance as well: in the Gospel of John, the thing of greatest glory is Jesus raised on the cross, the cross of self-giving love, a strange substitution for the immense and sublime.

Consider that for a time. Two millennia might enough time. On the other hand, it might not. It still puzzles me.

Come to think of it, maybe Jesus meant for us to, or meant at least for the disciples to—those gathered with him in that upper room. Yes, come to think of it, maybe this is exactly what Jesus meant for us to do—to consider this for a time. So, yes, maybe Jesus did pause here, or stop here. Though I just said the opposite, let’s act as if he did pause here, “Love one another,”

stopping here, glancing around the room, “Love one another,” giving the disciples a moment to take it in and then perhaps to act.

Thinking of Judas, now prowling the night; thinking of the one who would be Jesus’ enemy if he were to have his way; thinking of the one who would condemn himself (if the story of his suicide is correct) or would be condemned by history (if the story of his gruesome accident is correct)—perhaps Jesus paused here when having said, “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” For this would have been a good time for at least one of the disciples to say, having heard him, really heard him, “Jesus, wait a minute while I go get Judas. We actually need him here.”

Yes, this would have been a good time for at least one of the disciples to remember the story that Jesus told of the good shepherd who so loves his sheep that he’d risk everything to go in search of even one sheep that had gone missing; or the story that Jesus told of the widow who lit a lamp and swept her entire house looking for that one coin that was lost; or the story that Jesus told about a wayward son who left his father’s house and wasted his entire inheritance on things that do not satisfy only to return home with nothing but his own destitution and so begging to become his father’s slave. (Didn’t that father rejoice at his son’s return?)

Yes, this would have been a good time for someone around the table to do just this: to light a lamp and search the streets of the city for the one who was going lost, to love and forgive that one back into the fold, searching the hedgerows and ditches for Judas; searching the night-fallen streets for confused, aggrieved, raging, resentful, envious Judas.

Isn’t that what the gospel is all about?

Revenge is another tack you could take. Revenge: a pleasure John of Patmos seems well to have known—John of Patmos, the man behind the revelation that continues to spook and inspire, truly to misguide. I want to be clear that, when John of Patmos imagined a new heaven and a new earth, many are the people who weren’t at that table. John’s revelation is not of universal salvation, but one in which some, many, don’t make the cut. They’re the usual suspects (the fornicators, the faithless, the murderers, the liars, the idolaters, the polluted) along with some surprising others (the cowardly, the sorcerers).

But if he was offended by many sorts of people, I imagine he became so honestly. He was living under the fearsome press of occupation and war—Rome’s centuries-long occupation of

Jerusalem and Israel, and Rome's decades-long horrific War against the Jews. For this, it's safe to suppose John had seen all sorts of things, perhaps suffered all sorts of things, that put him a state of fear and bitterness, and perhaps stirred in him a dark desire for vengeance, for punishment. At all the injustice, at all the suffering of the lowly and the mindless reveling of the mighty: God knows I've got revenge in mind lately more than I care to admit. And if I feel it from the comfy rocking chair on my lovely porch, then why wouldn't John feel it on this horrific prison island? Patmos you might consider as an Alcatraz of the Aegean: I wouldn't think penal colonies have ever had much to brag about them, not even when placed in a pleasing climate.

And it might be for this reason that the book of Revelation itself almost didn't make the cut—that the author wasn't a credible witness, an *authoritative* witness for the will of God. No, he was instead perhaps driven (if understandably) by paranoia and revenge. As you may or may not know, when the biblical canon was first established, around the year 400, the book of Revelation was the last one let in, and over some notable voices of dissent. A millennium later, Martin Luther nearly cut it from the Protestant canon, considering it neither prophetic nor apostolic, stating, "I can in no way detect that the Holy Spirit produced it," and that in it "Christ is neither taught nor known."

What it has going for it, though, are these: an intolerance for injustice and abuse of power; a deep longing for justice and truth; an unshakeable faith that balance and order will come through Christ who, though a Lamb, might somehow defeat the fearsome beast that lurks and attacks like so many empires the world has known; and a bold hope that the troubles and terrors of history will come to wear themselves out and that Christ is coming in love and peace.

Imagine that!

Close your eyes if it helps. Jesus has come. History is fulfilled. All is reconciled, some strange cosmic reunion. You're feasting at a table, and you look around. A question: is Judas there?

Another question: who is Judas? One man, yes. He's many as well. Men and women who become revealed as traitors among us. They're people who've taken a dream we've held in common and broken faith with it, destroyed it. They're those who've used a trust we share to take advantage, sometimes great advantage, enriching themselves to grotesque proportion while bleeding of life the society that made their wealth possible. They're those who've doubted the very people we should trust and slandered those who'd meant to serve. They're those who've abused

things we hold sacred or spoken as if serious though put to cynical purpose or disingenuous end. These then: are these people at that table?

There was a time when my easy answer would have been, “Yes.” Proud of my magnanimity, puzzled by others’ apparent pettiness, I find myself in a harder place, amidst a far more trying time.

When the Trump era is over (for he cannot reign forever), when his grip on our social imaginary is loosed and a thing of the past (if another like him doesn’t rise to rule), we’re going to have healing work to do. How to recover from this radical change in social spirit? How to repair the breach that’s carved between “us” and “them”?

That work begins now. Imagine it. Close your eyes if that helps. But then open them and keep watch for what’s happening and for hope.

Thanks be to God.