

"All Things New"
Revelation 21:1-5

May 19,2019

5th Sunday of Easter

"Fix it, Mommy!", the little boy pleaded with his mother as the handle of his favorite cup lay broken off after he had dropped it. "Make it all better!" And, of course, she did what every good mother would do: she got out the glue and carefully attached the handle back to the cup again. "Fix it, Mommy. Make it all better!" How often did you use that phrase with your mother when you were a little kid? How often did you mothers hear that phrase from your children?

I think that Mother's Day, which we celebrated last Sunday, is so popular is because of the love we had for our mothers who could always "fix things" and "make things all better". When we got an "owwie" from falling off our bicycles, mother could fix that with a band aid and some ointment. When our feelings were hurt by something someone else had said, mothers could make those feelings "all better" with some homemade chocolate chip cookies and some cold milk after school. When we felt the sting of rejection by friends, Mother could comfort us with a hug and a word of encouragement. It is no wonder that we feel such a warm place in our hearts for our mothers.

However, as you grew older and moved out into the world, you encountered bigger problems that your mother couldn't fix or make all better. Deep feelings of shame over wrong things you had done or guilt over good things you should have done were no longer soothed by cookies and milk. Serious illnesses such as cancer could not be treated with band aids or other home remedies. Aging and, ultimately, death could not be prevented with a hug.

Others have tried to take mother's place in fixing things for us. Our world tries to make our consciences 'all better" by doing away with guilt by redefining right and wrong so that our behavior is always "right" and by stressing self-esteem so that we never do feel bad about ourselves. Doctors work hard to "fix" our sick and injured bodies with new medicines and surgical procedures. Scientists do research on how to slow down the aging process and prevent death.

But all of these efforts ultimately fail. They may give some temporary relief but they will not endure. And the reason they will not endure on a permanent basis is because they are attempting to deal with bits and pieces of a much bigger problem. They are dealing with only symptoms of a major disease. The real problem is not guilt or disease or aging or death. The problem which is the root of all these symptoms is sin.

Now, we typically think of sin only in terms of actions. In our modern world today, if people are going to admit the existence of sin at all, they think of it only in terms of "doing naughty things." Some might even acknowledge that sin includes not doing good things when one has the opportunity, as well. Christians who study the Scriptures will see that words, feelings, and thoughts can be sinful as well. Sin is seen, therefore, as something that corrupts our moral character and makes us bad people.

However, the Scriptures portray sin in much more serious terms. Sin does more than make us "bad" people, worthy of God's judgment and condemnation. Sin corrupts us in our very being and not only us, but sin corrupts creation and everything in it. Romans 8 speaks of creation being in "bondage to decay" because of sin. Therefore, to "fix things" and "make everything better" cannot be accomplished by dealing with the symptoms of this corruption.

As each new "self-help" program and method for boosting self-esteem comes along to soothe the guilt, more guilt will appear for different reasons. For each new cure that doctors are able to find some disease, another disease will come along. Doctors conquered polio, rheumatic fever, and other killers early in the past century only to have them replaced with AIDS, the ebola virus, and other more deadly diseases. Scientists make great strides to slow down the aging process and extend life, but death always wins in the end.

The only solution is not to tackle the symptoms, but to cure the disease. Things must not be "made better", but be remade completely new. No mother can do that, not even Jesus' mother. In Mel Gibson's "Passion of the Christ," there is a scene that I suspect is impossible for most people to forget once they've seen it. Jesus, beaten, bloodied, and forced to carry his cross, is on the way to Golgotha. Mothers his mother, Mary, is following along. At one point, Jesus stumbles and falls. As he is falling, his mother has a flashback to the time when he fell as little boy. And, both when Jesus is a child in the flashback and when He is a man in real time, Mary does what any mother does when her son falls. She runs to him. She holds him. She comforts Him with the words, "I'm here."

As Jesus struggles to stand, He looks at His mother, and He says, "See, I make all things new." You know what happens next. Jesus walks the rest of the Via Dolorosa – the Way of Sorrow. He is nailed to the cross that a stranger helps Him carry. And he dies. For you. In your place. With all of the wrath of God poured out on Him. Nothing remains for you but mercy, forgiveness, and life.

However, Jesus' death on the cross is not merely to forgive individual sins and clear our accounts with God for the time being. Jesus' death was to free us from the corruption of sin and make us completely new creatures in Christ. Jesus' resurrection, not only brought Jesus to life again, but was the beginning of the restoration and renewing of all creation.

He had restored each of you individually by your baptism in which you were "made new" by being born again, as the Scriptures call it. Your sin was taken away and you began a life-long spiritual journey in which the image of God, lost at the Fall into sin, would be restored to you. Our text for today gives us a preview of the end of our journey.

At the end of time, all of creation will be made new externally just as the people of God have been made new internally. The corruption of sin will be removed and the goodness of creation, as God originally intended it, will be restored.

The heavens and the earth, totally corrupted by sin, will be destroyed. Peter writes about it in his second epistle this way: "The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid

bare...That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness." (2 Peter 3:10-13)

Our text tells of that fulfillment. John writes, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away." This is a restoration to Garden of Eden status which is devoid of all problems. All of the so-called "natural" disasters which plague us - hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, floods, hail, lightning, and so on - as well as little things such as weeds and thorns and thistles will be eliminated when heaven and earth is made new.

In the Old Testament, the sea was feared by those who lived by it and those who sailed on it because of the winds, storms, and high waves which could easily crush boats and kill those aboard. It was viewed as the habitat of demons. The sea became symbolic of the "terrifying dread and the chaos and gulf that separates mankind and God because of mankind's sin and rebellion." (Brighton, p.593) Notice the little line that our text adds about that: "and there was no longer any sea."

In the new heaven and the new earth, we will not be separated from God by sin, nor will we experience His presence only through external means such as the water in baptism, the voice of a preacher, or bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. John writes, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God." The word for dwelling here is the same one used in John 1:14, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." We will be in the direct presence of God Himself, safe from the devil and all evil for all eternity.

Because we are in God's direct presence and because there is no devil and no evil, it also means that there is no cause for sorrow. There is no sin so there is no need for tears of guilt. With no sin also comes no hurt feelings or broken relationships. There are no more side effects of the corruption of sin: no diseases, no aging, and no impairment of our physical or mental abilities. We will have no reason at all to feel sad, blue, or depressed. "[God] will wipe every tear from their eyes."

But the most important thing is that the most serious consequence of sin, namely, death, will never affect us personally or never trouble us by affecting our loved ones ever again. John writes, "Death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying or pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Imagine not having to watch friends and relatives growing old and dying. Imagine not having to worry about yourself approaching death by accident, disease, or old age. That is what will be. Death was never a part of God's original plan. When the universe is made new, God's original plan will be restored and death will have no power there because it will no longer exist.

What hope is ours as Christians! Even though we live in a world broken by sin, we know that a time is coming when God will fix the brokenness and make all things new again. Because God has already made us new in Holy Baptism, declaring us to be holy in His sight through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and because Jesus rose from the dead to new life, opening the way to life after the grave for all who have been

made new, we can be assured that we will be there to witness that day when all things are made new and to enjoy that newness of life for all eternity.

This gives us the strength to endure life in an imperfect and broken world. All of the sorrows, hurts, pains, and problems are only temporary. They will be fixed. We can put up with them, much like an airline traveler puts up with a burned-out reading light. It's a minor annoyance that can be endured because he knows that he's on his flight home. Our problems here may seem worse than a burned-out light, but they really are not. The Bible says, "our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." But, as bad as they may seem now, we can put up with them because we are on our flight home.

As you have to endure these various problems in various ways, look to the future. Remember what God has done for you in making you new. Think about what God will do in making everything new. Confidently believe that God has this all in store for you, for me, and for all believers. As we once used to cry to our mommies, "Fix this! Make it all better!", believing that they always could, so we also cry out to our Heavenly Father, "Fix this! Make it all better", knowing that, one day, He will do just that. He will fix everything. He will make it all better. In fact, He will do even more than that. He will make all things new again. Amen.