

The Lessons Appointed for Use on

All Saints' Day

Year B

RCL



Isaiah 25:6-9

Psalm 24

Revelation 21:1-6a

The Collect

Almighty God, you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord: Give us grace so to follow your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those ineffable joys that you have prepared for those who truly love you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.

Isaiah 25:6-9

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples

a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged
wines strained clear.

And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all nations;
he will swallow up death forever.

Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from
all faces,

and the disgrace of his people he will take away
from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken.

It will be said on that day,

Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so
that he might save us.

This is the LORD for whom we have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Psalm 24 Page 613, BCP

Domini est terra

- 1 The earth is the LORD'S and all that is in it,
the world and all who dwell therein.
- 2 For it is he who founded it upon the seas
and made it firm upon the rivers of the deep.
- 3 “Who can ascend the hill of the LORD?
and who can stand in his holy place?”
- 4 “Those who have clean hands and a pure heart,
who have not pledged themselves to falsehood,
nor sworn by what is a fraud.
- 5 They shall receive a blessing from the LORD
and a just reward from the God of their salvation.”
- 6 Such is the generation of those who seek him,
of those who seek your face, O God of Jacob.
- 7 Lift up your heads, O gates;
lift them high, O everlasting doors;
and the King of glory shall come in.
- 8 “Who is this King of glory?”
“The LORD, strong and mighty,
the LORD, mighty in battle.”
- 9 Lift up your heads, O gates;
lift them high, O everlasting doors;
and the King of glory shall come in.
- 10 “Who is he, this King of glory?”
“The LORD of hosts,
he is the King of glory.”

Revelation 21:1-6a

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. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them as their God;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
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.”

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.” Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega,

the beginning and the end.”

SERMON

There is a quilt on our bed that was pieced by my Granny Schneider. Honestly, it's got some problems. Some of the pieces are torn and truthfully, it doesn't fit our mattress very well. The other morning Kathy said, "One day, I'm going to buy some quilts that fit this bed."

I replied, "Yes, but then they wouldn't have been made by Granny Schneider." We agreed that the better plan would be to restore the quilt. Sometimes, as in Granny's quilt, the wiser course is to love a thing, warts, torn places, and all. When we think about the problems of the world, however, we're very prone to think about replacement before we think about restoration. We think that this old world is beyond restoration and the best thing we can hope for is heaven when we die. I'd like to question that view.

Last Sunday, I sneaked an idea about restoration past you. I said, “In the Genesis account, a basically good reality is corrupted by free decisions reached by creatures and the task of people is to be accountable for their damage and to co-operate with God as He returns creation to its original state.” What has been damaged in our world, and what role have we to play in its restoration?

There could be many answers to that question, and just as many suggestions of what might be done to put the world right. I'm not interested in many answers. I want to find one answer, and I think I have found it in the words of Isaiah.

And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all nations;
he will swallow up death forever.

There is a shroud cast over us, Isaiah tells us. We

need to identify this shroud, this sheet spread over all nations, not only identify it but come to understand just what it is so that we can co-operate with God as He destroys it. The shroud is evil, and it is more than what you have come to think about it.

If you'll forgive me, what I often hear, when talking with people I meet, is that evil is what evil people do. If we could rid ourselves of the evil people, the thought goes, then we would rid ourselves of evil. Such a thought has the advantage of being simple, but the disadvantage of being terribly, horribly wrong in any analysis. It's circular reasoning. Evil is what evil people do? My! How convenient! I'm not an evil person, so I can do no evil. Goody for me! As I told my parents after a fight with my little brother, "It all started when he hit me back."

When Isaiah speaks of a shroud cast over all peo-

ples, he is speaking of something much more subtle and pervasive and much more threatening than fights between brothers or even fights between countries. He is speaking about the stain of sin that runs like a hidden flaw throughout all we do, one aspect of which is just this tendency to see evil as something other people do.

Evil is not just personal but structural and spiritual. It is not simply the result of human actions, but the consequence of huge systems over which no individual has full control.¹

That's why I sneaked that remark in last Sunday.

The gospel is not a message about the salvation of individuals from the world, but news about a world transfigured, right down to its basic structures. We, who claim the name Christian, have work to do for John of Patmos told us:

¹ The Powers That Be (Theology for a New Millennium), Walter Wink. Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them as their God;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
And the one who was seated on the throne
said, “See, I am making all things new.”

John of Patmos isn't telling us that this old world will one day be replaced by another. He is predicting the restoration of this world by the one who describes Himself as

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

If the home of God is to be with mortals, we ought to be about the task of preparing for His arrival. To do so, we must make a thorough and honest evaluation of the task before us. Just as I couldn't restore Granny's quilt by first blinding myself to the torn places, we have to face the actual fallen nature of the world. But as we undertake the task of restoration, we have also to keep

in mind that the world must continue to function in the meantime. We are about restoration, not destruction. Like Granny's quilt, there are loose places, but we're still warm at night in its embrace. The world in which Christians live is torn and battered, but it is still as God described it in the beginning – "good". It is the task of Christians to work to patch up the battered places while still living within the goodness of God's creation. It is the task of Christians to hold in mind always that God's creation is good; that God's creation is fallen; that God's creation will be redeemed. That is the meaning of God's ultimate victory.

The warp and weft of the shroud about which Isaiah speaks are formed of our loyalty to the notions which have led us to this current state. The strings of the warp are our unthinking acceptance of the belief that other people's evil entitles us to respond in kind. Evil is what

evil people do, so we're entitled to do evil to evil people. The weft is our unthinking acceptance of the idea that this constitutes justice. "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth", we shout. "Wonderful", Tevye replies in *Fiddler on the Roof*. "Soon the whole world will be blind and toothless." Isaiah says, in another place:

Ah, you who drag iniquity along with cords of falsehood,
who drag sin along as with cart-ropes,
Ah, you who call evil good
and good evil,
who put darkness for light
and light for darkness,
who put bitter for sweet
and sweet for bitter!
Ah, you who are wise in your own eyes,
and shrewd in your own sight!²

What an indictment that is! We take people addicted to drugs, throw them into prisons for outrageous lengths of time, then seal their fate with the scarlet letter of "convicted felon" so they will never again earn a living

² Isaiah 5:18, 20-21 NRSV

wage, and we call that justice. We convict someone of intentional murder, then we order others to intentionally murder them and tell them that they have acted justly. We bomb a hospital run by Doctors Without Borders and tell ourselves that this is acceptable because it wasn't intentional. We look at the bodies of 20 dead children and 6 adults in Newtown, Connecticut and say this is an acceptable price to pay to preserve the supposed right of everyone, no matter how crazy, to own any sort of firearm they wish.

We drag sin and inequity along with cords of falsehood, inventing endless good reasons to do bad things. If we are to repair Granny's quilt, we have first to face up to our failings. We have to intentionally be aware when we call evil good and good evil, when we put darkness for light and fancy that if we are wise and shrewd in our own eyes then we are truly righteous. My

friend, Bob Woodcock, has a great bumper sticker. It reads:

Don't Believe Everything You Think

Restoration begins with each of us, as we humbly accept God's correction when we have made idols of our own favorite things. Freeing yourself from the notion that evil is what evil people do and looking with humility at the holes in your own quilt is the first step. The second step is resolving to no longer cooperate with the darkness imposed by that shroud Isaiah spoke of. I hate to use a personal example, but this second step can mean turning your back on your life's work if the demands of that work are that you should urge people to put other people to death. Taking that second step means turning your back on the capitalist idea of owning things of immeasurable benefit to your brothers and sisters and profiting by that ownership. After spending

seven years studying the plague of polio and developing a vaccine, Dr. Jonas Salk said, “There is no patent. Could you patent the sun?” Taking that second step means rejecting the idea that profit and amassing fortune is the highest good and instead using your fame to found a food company, donating all the profits to charity as Paul Newman did to the tune of \$429.3 million. Taking that second step means walking away from a comfortable life here to teach orphans in Mexico as our missionary, Shea Wolford, has chosen to do.

There are many kinds of blanket. Granny’s quilt sustains us on cold nights while the shroud of which Isaiah speaks smothers us so that we truly put darkness for light and light for darkness. We are called to the task of restoration, church. Be about your chores.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

We've been told so often what a mess this old world is that I don't know if it is still possible to preach restoration, but I have. The world we live in is the gift God has granted us. It is our responsibility to at least not get in the way as God makes all things new. Better would be to co-operate with Him, with a full and grateful heart. Be about your work, church.

God shall supply all you need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.³

³ Philippians 4:19,20

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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