

“What We Already Know”

Rev. David Gregory
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Easter 5



Make All Things New
James B. Janknegt

Readings

David Whyte

in *Consolations: The Solace, Nourishment and Underlying Meaning of Everyday Words*

It is always hard to believe that the courageous step is so close to us, that it is closer than we ever could imagine, that in fact, we already know what it is, and that the step is simpler, more radical than we had thought: which is why we so often prefer the story to be more elaborate, our identities clouded by fear, the horizon safely in the distance, the essay longer than it needs to be and the answer safely in the realm of impossibility.

Revelation 21:1-6 f

from the New Revised Standard Version

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; they will be his peoples and God himself will be with them and be their God; 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. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.”

Historically, there is one prayer I've prayed more often than any other: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, he said, "Make it something like this." I'm not sure it was intended that we turn this prayer into a rote public communal prayer, but viewed as a template, it gives us a vision of something. It speaks of something new, an interruption of the status quo. Jesus never said "Settle in and let things be as they are." He wasn't implying that we needed to escape this earth and find some euphoric utopia in a far-off place called heaven. It was about bringing the heavenly realm to earth, or about creating something new and watching it unfold. The prayer speaks of a higher purpose, a better way, a greater hope, and a better outcome.

Given the events in Buffalo yesterday, and with the unfolding story of how and why they transpired, if indeed the "kingdom of heaven is at hand" (or as I would prefer to say, if the "realm of the Divine is always close by"), I would like to lay hold of that heaven, and together with you and with all humanity, bring it down into a manifestation of a more peaceful earth.

The racial aspect of this act of terror takes an expression of pure evil and magnifies it a hundred times. In the face of a newly emboldened movement of white supremacy, I find myself without words. It feels as though we're on a playground with a group of bullies picking a fight, daring us to enter the fray of the culture wars that are dividing our country and our world.

As a child I was taught not to fight. I was told that we do not hate anyone. If someone was picking a fight it was said that I should walk away, not as a sign of weakness, but as a sign of strength. As an adult, I can see the wisdom of that advice. Our resistance is what the bullies want. It's the fuel for their ego-driven hunger for power—or what they perceive to be power. And I'm sorry to say that what passes for news media and social media in our post-modern society has stored up enough resistance to fuel the bullies of the world for generations to come. We have to stop offering them resistance. *But we cannot ignore them, you say.*

In many respects I agree with you. I read a post this morning by my friend and colleague who lives in Buffalo barely three miles from the Tops Friendly Market where the shooting took place. My friend is a white man, a UCC minister, an outspoken preacher of social justice. He also happens to be married to a black man. I sense his fear, and as his friend I share it. I do not want this violence to continue. I cannot believe that minority rule can hold us hostage to such a thing. It remains unfathomable that even the unspeakable events at an elementary school like Sandy Hook did not break the spell, and that among the nations of the world, that our nation is so well known for its barbarism. But it is. In the portrayal of the Apostle John's vision of the Apocalypse, it is said:

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"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 and be their God; 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."

God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. I'm asking *when?* When will these things be? Death will be no more. But why does it keep happening to people who grocery shop, or go to a concert, or step onto a dance floor, or go to a movie theater, or attend a high school, or even an elementary school? Mourning and crying and pain will be no more. *When? How long?*

We have a problem in our culture, and if I could take the playground analogy just a bit further, the bullies unfortunately have the support and collusion of the principal's office. The real fight isn't with the bullies that are standing in front of us, it is the system of governance dominated by those who don't have the courage to do the bullying themselves. They empower the ones who will do it for them. And how do we get to the root of it? How do we find our way into humanity's operating system and effect an update? How do we manifest the divine realm in our midst? How do we bring heaven to earth? The answer begins inside of us. David Whyte says:

It is always hard to believe that the courageous step is so close to us, that it is closer than we ever could imagine, that in fact, we already know what it is, and that the step is simpler, more radical than we had thought: which is why we so often prefer the story to be more elaborate, our identities clouded by fear, the horizon safely in the distance, the essay longer than it needs to be and the answer safely in the realm of impossibility.

We don't think that change is possible. We think societal problems are too complex to be addressed. White supremacy seems too strongly rooted; after all, it's been a feature of our national psyche from the very beginnings of our constitutional government, and even before that. There is a new world, however, that exists on a different frequency from what is physical. In the language of two thousand years ago, it is a heavenly kingdom not visible to us, but close at hand. "What's it like?" we might ask. And we hear: Descending from heaven "like a bride adorned for her husband." Like a mustard seed that seems insignificant and imperceptible, yet grows into a huge shrub; like a little leaven that goes into a lump of dough and begins working in ways that we cannot perceive, but finally eventuates in delicious bread that sustains life.

There's a new world coming, one that's right beside us, inhabited by those we think we've lost, but who've simply emerged, changed in a moment, released from their bodies into a non-physical presence that is nothing but peace, nothing but justice, nothing but love for all of humankind. The question is, however, whether we wish to wait until we die to experience this new world, or if we'd like to become conduits of it, bringing it into manifestation in the world that we see with our human eyes.

We've all had dreams or visions of the future, visions which might be figurative or literal, or something in between. Moments of inspiration and insight come to us in many forms. The Book of the Revelation is a biblical expression of a dream or vision that overflows with metaphor, some of which is difficult to comprehend or interpret, some of which contains rather frightening or unsettling imagery. It is a book of change, and change can be very unsettling. For some, the phrase "Behold, I make all things new" is a welcome announcement. For others it feels threatening. When David Whyte speaks of change, he speaks of the "courageous step," the thing that is closer to us and "more radical than we thought."

It's always easier to remain with the status quo, to keep things as they are, rather than open ourselves to this cutting edge of creation. But the fact is, we are co-creators, and we don't have the option not to create. And so we must choose whether that creation is something that happens to us by default, directed and maintained by the bullies on the playground, or something that we do by design, by removing our gaze from their red-faced tantrums and fixing our gaze on something better, inviting others to do the same, and setting about to create the world that we want.

Yesterday in this very room we listened to story after story of Tom Green and his vision for peace in the world, one that led him to communicate in the highest echelons of world power. Tom and many others like him envisioned a world where the iron curtain could fall, and they saw it happen. They saw things on earth as they were in heaven. What this tells me is that the answer is something we already know. In the words of Gandhi, we can be the change we wish to see in the world. Many of us at 9:00 a.m. every morning join a global intention for peace in Ukraine. We can train that same attention to peace in our grocery stores, peace in our elementary schools, peace in the streets of our troubled cities.

There is a new world coming. We're all part of it. We're in the process of bringing it into being. It's less frightening when we do it together; in fact, it's downright exciting. I leave you with some words made familiar to us by Cass Elliott:

There's a new world coming
And it's just around the bend
There's a new world coming
This one's coming to an end

There's a new voice calling
You can hear it if you try
And it's growing stronger
With each day that passes by

There's a brand new morning
Rising clear and sweet and free
There's a new day dawning
That belongs to you and me

Yes a new world's coming
The one we've had visions of
Coming in peace, coming in joy
Coming in love.

Here's a YouTube link to Cass's song. Take a listen.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7LVIEAhH1pM>