

Sermon Series: Confessions of a Church Pastor
Sermon: “Behold! I Am Making All Things New!”
What I Believe Are the Most Important Words a Pastor Can Say (Part 1)

Revelation 21:1-5a; 1 Corinthians chapter 15; 2 Corinthians 5:17

Pastor Thomas Hoffmann
The Week of November 15, 2020

Revelation 21:1-5a (CEB)

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ I heard a loud voice from the throne say, “Look! God’s dwelling is here with humankind. He will dwell with them, and they will be his peoples. God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. There will be no mourning, crying, or pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

⁵ Then the one seated on the throne said, “Look! I’m making all things new.”

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

I am sure I have told you about my participation in the Morris, OK, tornado in 1984 that devastated most of that community at that time. I arrived with other paramedics less than 5 hours after it hit, in order to be available to any further casualties encountered during the ongoing response.

That same day we received an emergency call from a Trooper who was manning a nearby checkpoint: there was a man down. It took us less than a minute to reach them, and we saw a State Trooper administering CPR. “He was coming into Morris and stopped his car at the checkpoint,” another officer told us. “He got out to talk to us. He was fumbling with a pill bottle, and then he collapsed. He stopped breathing. There was no pulse.” It only took a few seconds to put the

paddles on him and give him a shock. A few seconds later he was talking with us, asking what had happened.

Later on it dawned on me as to what occurred: we had just resurrected someone from the dead.

Let's pray: Lord, may the words of my mouth and the reflections of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, for you are our rock and our salvation.

I have arrived at my last two sermons in the series, Confessions of a Church Pastor. I will still be with you during Advent, and my final time in worship with you will be in whatever way we are able to celebrate Christmas Eve together. In the sense that I can choose my topics for only two more Sundays until Advent arrives, this week and next will be the last two sermons of my 34-year service as an appointed pastor.

So I have been thinking: what are the last two things I want to say to you?

The first thing I want to say I knew right away, but I struggled with how to best say it. I then realized that this can only be said through words of St. Paul, from 1 Corinthians chapter 15 (the Message paraphrase).

15 ¹⁻² Friends, let me go over the Message with you one final time— this Message that I proclaimed and that you made your own; this Message on which you took your stand and by which your life has been saved. (I'm assuming, now, that your belief was the real thing and not a passing fancy, that you're in this for good and holding fast.)

³⁻⁹ The first thing I did was place before you what was placed so emphatically before me: that the Messiah died for our sins, exactly as Scripture tells it; that he was buried; that he was raised from death on the third day, again exactly as Scripture says; that he presented himself alive to Peter, then to his closest followers, and later to more than five hundred of his followers all at the same time, most of them still around (although a few have since died); that he then spent time with James and the rest of those he commissioned to represent him; and that he finally presented himself alive to *me*. It was fitting that I bring up the rear. . . .

¹⁰⁻¹¹ But because God was so gracious, so very generous, here I am. And I'm not about to let his grace go to waste. Haven't I worked hard . . . ? Even

then, my work didn't amount to all that much. It was God giving me the work to do, God giving me the energy to do it. So whether you heard it from me or from any other preacher, it's all the same: We spoke God's truth and you entrusted your lives.

¹²⁻¹⁵ Now, let me ask you something profound yet troubling. If you became believers because you trusted the proclamation that Christ is alive, risen from the dead, how can you let people say that there is no such thing as a resurrection? If there's no resurrection, there's no living Christ. And face it—if there's no resurrection for Christ, everything we've told you is smoke and mirrors, and everything you've staked your life on is smoke and mirrors. Not only that, but we would be guilty of telling a string of barefaced lies about God, all these affidavits we passed on to you verifying that God raised up Christ—sheer fabrications, if there's no resurrection.

¹⁶⁻²⁰ If corpses can't be raised, then Christ wasn't, because he was indeed dead. And if Christ weren't raised, then all you're doing is wandering about in the dark, as lost as ever. It's even worse for those who died hoping in Christ and resurrection, because they're already in their graves. If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a few short years, we're a pretty sorry lot. But the truth is that Christ *has* been raised up, the first in a long legacy of those who are going to leave the cemeteries.

²¹⁻²⁸ There is a nice symmetry in this: Death initially came by a man, and resurrection from death came by a man. Everybody dies in Adam; everybody comes alive in Christ. But we have to wait our turn: Christ is first, then those with him at his Coming, the grand consummation when, after crushing the opposition, he hands over his kingdom to God the Father. He won't let up until the last enemy is down—and the very last enemy is death! As the psalmist said, "He laid them low, one and all; he walked all over them."

³⁰⁻³³ . . . Do you think I'd do this kind of work if I wasn't convinced of your resurrection and mine as guaranteed by the resurrected Messiah Jesus? . . . It's resurrection, resurrection, always resurrection, that undergirds what I do and say, the way I live. If there's no resurrection, "We eat, we drink, the next day we die," and that's all there is to it. . . .

³⁵⁻³⁸ Some skeptic is sure to ask, "Show me how resurrection works. Give me a diagram; draw me a picture. What does this 'resurrection body' look like?"

If you look at this question closely, you realize how absurd it is. There are no diagrams for this kind of thing. We do have a parallel experience in gardening. You plant a “dead” seed; soon there is a flourishing plant. There is no visual likeness between seed and plant. You could never guess what a tomato would look like by looking at a tomato seed. What we plant in the soil and what grows out of it don’t look anything alike. The dead body that we bury in the ground and the resurrection body that comes from it will be dramatically different.

³⁹⁻⁴¹ You will notice that the variety of bodies is stunning. Just as there are different kinds of seeds, there are different kinds of bodies—humans, animals, birds, fish—each unprecedented in its form. You get a hint at the diversity of resurrection glory by looking at the diversity of bodies not only on earth but in the skies—sun, moon, stars—all these varieties of beauty and brightness. And we’re only looking at pre-resurrection “seeds”—who can imagine what the resurrection “plants” will be like!

⁴²⁻⁴⁴ This image of planting a dead seed and raising a live plant is a mere sketch at best, but perhaps it will help in approaching the mystery of the resurrection body—but only if you keep in mind that when we’re raised, we’re raised for *good*, alive forever! The corpse that’s planted is no beauty, but when it’s raised, it’s glorious. Put in the ground weak, it comes up powerful. The seed sown is natural; the seed grown is supernatural—same seed, same body, but what a difference from when it goes down in physical mortality to when it is raised up in spiritual immortality!

⁴⁵⁻⁴⁹ We follow this sequence in Scripture: The First Adam received life, the Last Adam is a life-giving Spirit. Physical life comes first, then spiritual—a firm base shaped from the earth, a final completion coming out of heaven. The First Man was made out of earth, and people since then are earthy; the Second Man was made out of heaven, and people now can be heavenly. In the same way that we’ve worked from our earthy origins, let’s embrace our heavenly ends. . . .

⁵¹⁻⁵⁷ But let me tell you something wonderful, a mystery I’ll probably never fully understand. We’re not all going to die—*but* we are all going to be changed. You hear a blast to end all blasts from a trumpet, and in the time that you look up and blink your eyes—it’s over. On signal from that trumpet from heaven, the dead will be up and out of their graves, beyond the reach of death, never to die again. At the same moment and in the same way, we’ll all

be changed. In the resurrection scheme of things, this has to happen: everything perishable taken off the shelves and replaced by the imperishable, this mortal replaced by the immortal. Then the saying will come true:

Death is swallowed by triumphant Life!
Who got the last word, oh, Death?
Oh, Death, who's afraid of you now?

It was sin that made death so frightening and it was guilt that came from breaking God's laws that gave sin its leverage, its destructive power. But now in a single victorious stroke of Life, all three—sin, guilt, death—are gone, the gift of our Master, Jesus Christ. Thank God!

⁵⁸ With all this going for us, my dear, dear friends, stand your ground. And don't hold back. Throw yourselves into the work of the Master, confident that nothing you do for him is a waste of time or effort.

Lord Jesus, may your Holy Spirit enliven this hearing of your Holy Word, and may we truly be doers and believers—and not just listeners—of the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Amen.