### “Love One Another” Steve Finlan for The First Church, May 15, 2022

**Revelation 21:3–6**

3I heard a loud voice from the throne saying . . . 4 “God 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.”

5 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.” 6Then 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**

31When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 33Little 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.’ 34I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Welcome, Easter people! We are Easter people rejoicing that Christ is risen. The apostles rejoiced to learn from Jesus, but were often puzzled by his messages. In even more ways, the Book of Revelation can be puzzling, too.

What can we say about Revelation? Revelation describes a promise for those who believe, a promise to make all things new, to wipe away every tear and to eliminate death. All will be nurtured from the “spring of the water of life” (21:6). This is an amazing passage; something for us to hold onto as part of our future. I think that the afterlife, for us, will be as though all things are indeed made anew. God will wipe every tear from our eyes. We will become more aware of God’s spiritual ministry to us, as we will be receiving it from the spring of the water of life. We will learn more about who Jesus is, and come to understand the ways in which he is the Alpha and the Omega, that is, the A and the Z of our lives, and even of this very earth. Jesus is Lord of the world.

Why, then, isn’t this world a better place? We sometimes forget that he is not in a hurry. He has all the time in the world. The wheel of progress grinds slowly but surely. We will get there in the end. God’s transformative goals for us require our participation. His love fills the world and us, only if we let it. We can imagine that time is unimportant in the afterlife. What matters is our participation in God’s love and its rippling effect outward into the world.

Human participation is emphasized in the Gospel passage. We are to receive divine love and pass it on. In fact, the divine love does not penetrate to everywhere it is meant to go unless we get in the flow of it, and pass it on. Even though his whole message up to this point has emphasized love, he reintroduces it here as a *new* commandment, “that you love one another. Just as I have loved you” (13:34). And that is the supreme test. By *this* will everyone know that you are Jesus’ disciples, by your love for one another (13:35). This is not something God does arbitrarily, nor something that God does for benefit of believers alone, for we are all God’s children. It is a love that we are meant to spread abroad, primarily to our fellow believers (that’s the “for one another” part), but also for those who do not believe: “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 19:19; 22:39). And it is so that “everyone will know that you are my disciples” (John 13:35). Even people who don’t follow Jesus know that Jesus taught love of God and love of fellow humans.

The promises in Revelation are spiritually consistent with the teachings in the gospels. It is because of God’s love that the afterlife will be a place of spiritual growth, and that “mourning and crying and pain will be no more” (Rev 21:4). Jesus created the human race to live for love, and he will guide us in the next world as we are educated in love. Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, both in terms of creative power and in terms of foundational love.

Imagine that the one who set life going on this planet had a plan for the eventual spiritualizing of the human beings that would emerge on that planet, and that he had a plan for the eventual progress and transformation of the human race itself. If we get on board and decide to cooperate with Jesus, we are becoming joined with the true father of this world, with the Alpha and Omega of the human race.

Life on this world will begin to change when more people make this commitment to cooperate with the creator, even to become co-creators. When we love, we become co-creators with God. Other religions may also be learning about this commitment to love one another. The founding Scripture of the Taoist religion, the *Tao te Ching*, says “Conceived of as having no name, it is the Originator of heaven and earth; conceived of as having a name, it is the Mother of all things” (*Tao te Ching* 1; translated by James Legge). Syrian Christians and a European group called the Moravians actually do refer to the Spirit as the Mother of all things or the Mother of the Church, which provides a potential point of commonality with Taoism. Seeking to harmonize with the will of the Originator or Mother is the same fundamental motive as seeking to do the will of God. The Spirit of Truth can also feed truth into other religions.

I think it is possible that many honest Buddhists, Taoists, or Muslims may eventually find out that they have been saved by the eternal Word of God, who turns out to be Jesus. If people are spiritually growing, they will be led to Jesus, if not here and now, then in the afterlife. First Peter speaks of Jesus preaching “to the spirits in prison” (3:19) who had died in ages past, and one does not preach to beings who are incapable of responding or converting. First Peter says “The gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that . . . they might live in the spirit as God does” (1 Pet 4:6). The preaching had a saving purpose, drawing people to live in the spirit.

Jesus did not advocate spiritual *sameness*; God does not create clones. God enjoys variety. Jesus called for tolerance and sympathetic spirituality among people who walk different paths, and whose paths eventually will converge in God. He shocked his apostles when he responded to their complaint about a strange preacher who “does not follow with us,” by saying “Do not stop him; for whoever is not against you is for you” (Luke 9:49–50). He was not concerned with social control, but only with spiritual growth. And remember, only God has the last word in matters of spiritual truth.

What did the Scriptures tell us today? Revelation says God will give water “to the thirsty . . . as a gift from the spring of the water of life” (21:6). We will become more aware of God’s spiritual nurturing of us. We will find out just how Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, and creator and finisher of this world. We will learn how he makes progress happen, and just how God comforts those who have been unjustly treated in this world. God needs us to participate in his work, to pass on the love we have received. This is the evidence that we are the disciples of the one who embodied love.

He is working to transform the world, though it seems we are very far from it right now. He seems to be working through other religions, sometimes. He preached to souls in the afterlife, and he may do it again, to reach those who went part way according to the best that they knew, but who need more help. Whoever is not against us is for us. Just *how* Jesus will change the world and how he will reach souls who have passed on, is something of a mystery to us. But we should trust him when he says “See, I am making all things new . . . To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life” (Rev 21:5–6).