

Easter 7C

Revelation 22:12-14; 16-17; 20-21

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St. George's Bolton

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Bookends

*"Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. **I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.**"*

The beginning and the end. Dates on a tombstone. Bookends to a life lived.

The Beginning and End of Childhood. Today being Mother's day, we are reminded of that precious time in life, when we are children and later on, when we have children of our own. It is fun being a parent. It is great being a child. Even though it normally represents a fifth of our lifetime, childhood feels as though it will last forever. It is a time of hope and wonder and possibility. We can grow up, we are told, to be anything we want to be. Mothers stand as the Alpha bookend of life, from whence we came. They play a powerful role in shaping us as human beings. We owe them so much, it is incalculable. Even Jesus's teaching and phrasing, some scholars suggest, is shaped by the words of Mary his mother in the Magnificat. [Luke 1:46-55] For example: *'And Mary said, "**My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.** For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. **He has shown strength with his***

arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever."

We love being moms and dads so much, that it is tempting to extend parenting beyond the traditional bookend of age 18. Today, many young people spend much of their 20's returning home to live with their parents, in order to pay off college loans and gain a springboard to a good life. Parents are eager to a point to extend this "Omega" because it is a flexible, moving goal post. In a way, life is like that. We know from whence it came and when it came. So many tombstones have those dates etched upon them with their owner's names. They await the conclusion of these lives for the end date to be inscribed. For most of us, we see our own omega as a floating end date, somewhere off in the distant future.

The Beginning and End of a Sporting Event. When you watch a sporting event, the clock dominates. There is the beginning of the game. There is the first quarter. There is halftime. There is the final quarter. As the game progresses, the tension rises. At some point in many games, usually in the fourth quarter, the winner appears to be inevitable and then the tension decreases. The team plays out the clock, they are so far ahead, it no longer matters how high the score will be. They just want to use of their time until the buzzer sounds and, well, game over. Isn't this sometimes a metaphor for life? Are we just letting the clock run out on life? Do we do that for a few years at a job prior to retirement? Do we just use up the valuable commodity of time and waste it?

The Beginning and End of a Work Day. Work-days begin with such great hope of potential: the possibility of completing all the work on your desk. There is the possibility of finishing a project. There is opportunity to spend time with work friends. Some of that potential will be realized. As is so often the case, other hopes will not come to reality and we come to accept this. We are in the end, I hope, grateful for the day God has given us and the opportunity to serve God in the world. The sky darkens, and we arrive home at last. The bed beckons to us after a few hours with our families or friends. The Omega can also be a small, looming end-point of this day, the clock marking the few remaining moments as it draws to a close, never to come around again. We are lulled into a sense of security, knowing that another workday will follow and assuming that the cycle will continue in the morning. The sun also rises.

The Beginning and End of a Politician's Term of Office. Again, the commencement of a politician's term of offices bodes well with great hope for the future. Some dreams will be realized, and others will fail to come to fruition and will land in the ash heap of history. And there are those, (*perhaps the politicians themselves*) that cannot wait for their terms to expire.

God's Time: the Alpha and the Omega. *"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."* God is a being unlike us, who lives outside time, and who is not confined or constrained by time. Time is only a construct that we use as humans to measure the time we have been given within God's time. Still, Jesus is the **Word** at the beginning of time as we know it, and as the Book of Revelation proclaims, Jesus is the Omega, the **Word** at the end of time. In between the Universe and all its time exists, a time so vast, it is impossible to

comprehend. And God transcends all that in comprehensibleness. At the end of our own life, Jesus stands reaching out his hand, welcoming us back, the Omega point to which we walk, sometimes run, while counting our time left to complete the "race" as St. Paul calls it: [in Second Timothy 4:6-8] *"For I am already on the point of being sacrificed; the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing."* Paul saw his Omega coming and ran toward it. He knew before he crossed the finish line, that he had completed the race. How about you? Are you running toward God? Are you running with me Jesus, as Malcolm Boyd once asked? Know that Jesus is running with you, by your side in this race. The finish line is just ahead, do not lose heart, stay the course. God reigns over time, and your Omega date has yet to be etched in stone, until then, you have plenty of time to do what you need to do, one day at a time, no matter how short you think your time is.

Beginning and end of a life. Humanity is defined by those two dates. We are mortal. From dust, we are reminded on Ash Wednesday, we were created. The words of the liturgy are stark and disturbing: *"Remember that you are dust and unto dust you shall return."* After cremation, all that is left is dust that is quickly blown away in the wind when it is poured out of the container, as though we are anxious to return to the elements from whence we came. Etching on a stone, a name with two dates, soon forgotten and rarely visited of a life lived. Even the etching itself will be erased by time, as it marches on toward the final *grand Omega*: but we know God will not forget us, though the world will.

As life progresses, that date of birth sounds further and further in the past than it did when we were young. And the end date looms larger and closer than ever. Time is short. The season of Advent shouts at us, '*What time is it?*' This is a question Christians ought to continually ask themselves each day. The answer is that it is *God's* time and that *God* has given you this one more day to live. Let us rejoice and be glad in it!

And so we are left with those dates on a stone: *Will they be Bookends to a life well lived? Amen*