

*Then 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. 2And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3And 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; 4he 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." 5And 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."*

I want you to imagine two mountains, two great peaks divided by a deep valley - two mountains, one of which we shall name Eden, the other New Jerusalem. These two pinnacles stand at the beginning and the end of the Bible – the beginning and end of this world – past and future.

Eden is where we have been, guarded by the cherubim with the flaming sword so that no one can return. (Genesis 3:22-24) How we want to return to some yesterday that seems better than it ever was!

Childhood with Mom and Dad – the whole family gathered at the table.

That time when you were in the service and those who walked through the valley of the shadow of death together were closer than brothers – true comrades.

When the children were young and your husband was still alive.

When your skin was soft, before your hair was grey.

That Easter morning when the church was full of faith as the walls vibrated with "Jesus Christ Is Risen Today".

Though then it never really was an Eden, time has washed away the dirty diapers, or the loneliness that was a companion even then. We long for Eden. Still every passing minute takes us further away - like water flowing down – always further away from the peak.

So often God's people have sought to go back! If only we could be like people used to be has been the wish in every age. Like back when children respected their elders and the law of God – when right was right and wrong was wrong. Why the children of Israel even wanted to go back to slavery in Egypt when God led them toward tomorrow through the wilderness!

Someday our children will talk about these days as the good old days – remembering how they made their beds and did the dishes – forgetting how many times they needed to be told before they did.

Back to the days of David, of Moses, of Abraham, back to the days of Eden. But the cherubim guards the past.

There are two mountains – the second The New Jerusalem. We try to climb this mountain, to build it ourselves. We save our dollars, we get our exercise, we guard our children. Still disease, decay, death overshadow us. We work and we work to arrange the furniture that is our life just so but a friend moves or the pastor speaks about God in a new way or the price of gasoline goes up 20 cents. New Jerusalem is no more ours than Eden. On both mountains we are a drop of water flowing down away from the peak – coming to rest in the deepest place in the valley where God has erected the cross of Christ.

At the cross all humanity stands as sisters and brothers, loved as family. Of the cross Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him.” This is God’s glory: to give himself in suffering and death for his own – loving us no matter what the cost.

As he was soon to go to the cross Jesus said, “A new command I give to you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

Love one another in this moment. In the cross of Jesus yesterday is gone. Not only are all of your sins forgiven but your neighbor’s sins are forgiven there as well - all of your neighbor’s sins.

I say to God, “How can I love this person who has done these terrible things to me – who lied to me – who abused me – who cheated me. Lord, there is no way I can love her for she is the person who talked behind my back – who never helped me in my hour of need.”

Jesus replies, “Of course you cannot love such people. No one can. So here is what I will do. I will take all their sins - I die their death and I will give them all my holiness, innocence and blessedness. I will say to your neighbor, ‘Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they were red like crimson, they shall become like wool.’ Here at the cross I will make your neighbor new,(and you, too). Now love one another.”

“Behold I am making all things new,” says our God. You, your neighbor and tomorrow.

We are going where we have never been, not back to Eden, nor to some paradise we have imagined for ourselves, but to the new heaven and new earth. But do you notice that wen

John sees the vision it is not of a holy people marching into a holy city. What God has planned is not our planning and forming some perfect society where there are no unwanted children or making agreements that end all wars. Women and men have dreamed of such an end and have been ready to sacrifice any neighbors that stand in the way of such dreams. Even in the church that has happened, especially in the church.

This one finds the doctrine too impure. That one finds the children too noisy. Another finds the pastor too weak and sinful. Or the carpeting not plush enough. These become excuses to no longer love one another. Like Frenchmen once guillotining one another in the name of Liberty, Equality, and Brotherhood or Stalin slaughtering millions of workers in order to create a workers paradise.

No, when John was granted the vision he saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. We cannot climb to the New Jerusalem; we remain at the foot of the cross, loving one another. God will bring God's future down to us here.

In Christ yesterday is no longer ours – its sins – its glories - we turn over to Christ. And tomorrow is not our possession either for it comes down new from our Father.

Today we are given, to so believe and trust in him who died for us that the whole world is filled with our forgiven brothers and sisters whom we love.