

December 20, 2015

Advent Vision: Alpha & Omega

Revelation 1:1-8

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Nineteen years ago this month, a little group of Lutherans in Wake Forest gathered for their first-ever worship service. Back then, there was no big, beautiful church on the Rogers Road hill. Those folks were just renting space, sharing a tiny little stone chapel on South Main Street with the local Roman Catholic congregation.

That first worship service was a nice start. But, as they gathered before the altar that day, none of those folks – not even Pastor Wagner – knew what was going to happen next. Would that fledgling congregation thrive and flourish? Or would it be a constant struggle just to survive? No one knew for sure.

None of us know for sure, do we, what the future holds for our own lives, for our own families, for our own nation. There are only five days until Christmas; but who knows what surprises might be in store for us between now and then? Are we going to thrive and flourish? Or will we struggle every day just to get by? None of us know, do we?

We live in a world of change. Cultural change, technological change, political change, climate change. Morals and values are changing, the legal definition of marriage is changing, the health care system is changing, the way we fight wars is changing. Many members of our congregation are facing employment changes, family changes, marriage changes, health changes, hairline changes, waistline changes.

Life in our 21st-century world is filled with change. And,

for most of us, dealing with change is stressful, difficult, and disturbing.

The Apostle John, living in the Bible days, knew a thing or two about change, too. His life changed dramatically the day Jesus came walking up to him on the lake shore, and said, "Follow me." John changed jobs, giving up his fishing business, and becoming a fisher of men. And then John witnessed the world around him changing in the years after Christ's resurrection and ascension. The followers of Jesus Christ grew rapidly, but they faced resistance and persecution more and more.

Toward the end of his change-filled life, John was chosen by God to observe a series of visions and revelations of the heavenly realms. Today, our Advent sermon series ends by looking at a couple of important verses from the very beginning of the book of Revelation.

First, in verse 7, John prophesies of Jesus, *"Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him."*

John is envisioning here the second coming of Christ, isn't he? Not Baby Jesus, born in a humble stable. But King Jesus, returning in glory to bring this world to an end. The whole human race will witness his coming this time. The One who was pierced, and killed on Good Friday, will be recognized on Judgment Day as the one Savior and Judge of the human race.

For Christians like us, that will be a happy day, a glorious day! There will be no wailing, no fear, at Christ's return, for those who believe in Jesus. Because he's already forgiven

us, already saved us. And when we see him coming back, in the clouds, he's coming to bring us home to heaven.

Until that day, though, we live in this world of change. Though we live with faith, we still struggle, don't we, with the unsettling, unpredictable shifts and jolts that come our way.

So John shares for us these next words, verse 8. Words of reassurance. Words to help us through these troubled times. Words to remind us that, even though everything around us is changing and shifting, one thing remains constant. One thing does not change. Only one thing can give us the reassurance of stability and certainty.

Only God is changeless. Only our God is always the same, yesterday, today, and forever. Only God is the changeless force that can help you and me make it through this ever-changing world.

John hears the voice of God the Father himself breaking into his vision. The apostle writes down God's words. Verse 8: *"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."*

The Alpha and the Omega -- not the title of God's fraternity; but a familiar phrase to John's readers. Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and Omega the last letter. Many of the early Christians in John's day came from the Jewish tradition, and knew the many Old Testament passages which refer to God as "the first and the last." So when the Lord God gives himself a title here, *"the Alpha and the Omega,"* he is reminding us that he is eternal. He is immutable. He is all in all. God is without beginning and without end. He is the one force that never changes.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

Some of you know that those Greek letters, the Alpha and the Omega, were affixed to the front of the altar of that little rented chapel where the Lutheran Mission of Wake Forest held its first service. And when the people of Hope Lutheran Church built this church, those same letters were added to the front of our new altar.

These letters remind us today that God alone is the force that enables this church to thrive and flourish. None of us know what changes are coming for our congregation in the next five days, or the next five years. But we do know that we can always count on our changeless God, and that he will see us through.

What about in your home? Do you have these Greek letters fixed to your front door? Do you have them engraved on your wedding ring? Hanging on the wall of your kids' bedrooms, or decorating our Christmas trees? Maybe we should.

These letters remind us that we are not facing this world of change by ourselves. You don't have to navigate all the unknowns and uncertainties of life alone. You don't have to be super-smart, super-strong, super-faithful. You have the Lord God, the Almighty, the One who is, and who was, and who is to come, on your side. Your family, your children, and your spouse, have the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, as your Savior, your Protector, your Friend.

The world around us will always change. But the love of God, the power of the Lord Almighty, and the promise of the Advent Savior, will never change. Amen.

