

The End, the Beginning & the Whole Story
Revelation 1:4b-8

Christ the King 11/21/21
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*That' how we ended up
at the Emerald Village Gem Mine in Spruce Pine,
3 hours late.*



You, know
if you start a story at the end,
it doesn't make much sense, does it?
You have no idea
what I'm talking about if I start with,
*'That's how we ended up
at the Emerald Village Gem Mine in Spruce Pine,
3 hours late.'*

You have no context
or insight
or meaning;
you have no connection
to what happens in the story
about the 1st grade field trip
two years ago
that Tabitha Clark and I agreed to chaperone,
and arrived very late to,
if I start at the end of the story.

No,
you see we all know,
a good story starts at the beginning.
A good story starts with,
*The 1st grade field trip
was to Emerald **Village** Gem Mine,
in Spruce Pine,
but our first mistake
was that I drove*

*to Emerald **Hallow** Gem Mine
in Hiddenite.*

Of course, there is **more** to the story
—and just the mention of “the first mistake”
hopefully has your interesting hooked
and wanting to hear more.

Do you think
if you had never heard anything
about the Bible
and you started at the end,
with the book of Revelation,
would you be hooked
and wanting more?

Because today here we are,
at the end of story.
We’re reading from the last book of scripture;
a book full of blood and guts,
war and vivid visions
of strange beasts and chilling creatures.

A book of holy text
that is often misread
as though it were forecasting the events
for the end of time.

To enter the world of Revelation
requires care and attentiveness to detail;
plunging into this book
seems to be a journey
most of us Christians don’t want to take.

Yet today’s scripture does
not mention the dragon or mortally wounded beast
with three heads.

There is no mention
of the four horsemen of the apocalypse.
Instead, our text today
sounds triumphant and celebratory.

And because this is the final day
in the church calendar year,
called Christ the King Sunday,
we make strong declarations
of glory and dominion
with what feels like a victorious end.

But is this the end?
Or is this a beginning?
Or is this the middle?

Hear now a word from the Lord:

^{4b}Grace to you and peace
from him who is
and who was
and who is to come,
and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,
⁵and from Jesus Christ,
the faithful witness,
the firstborn of the dead,
and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and freed us
from our sins by his blood,
⁶and made us to be a kingdom,
priests serving his God and Father,
to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

⁷Look! He is coming with the clouds;
every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him;
and on his account
all the tribes of the earth will wail.
So, it is to be. Amen.

⁸"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God,
who is and who was
and who is to come,
the Almighty.



This unflinching statement about God,
God who is
and who was
and who is to come
collapses our notion of linear time.
With verbs like, **was, is** and **is to come**,
we are always
perpetually in the middle
and the beginning
and the end
...all at the same time.

To be in the presence of this God
means not only is there more—
the story is also **ongoing**;
it is irrelevant how you enter the story or when
—and because it is Revelation,
it is only important detail to remember,
is to read between the lines.

Time is one of the unique markers
of the Jesus' reign as king.
Everything we know,
exists in time.
Everything we experience,
exists in time.
Everything we love,
exists within the perimeters of time.

Some of us, on rare occasions,
have had what we might call,
a transcendent or out-of-body experiences
where briefly, time falls away.

But did you hear how I described that?
Briefly...

we have a hard time relating to anything
without using *time* as a quantifier.

But our story takes us
to the throne of the one
who created time.

Revelation wants us to understand,
on this Christ the King Sunday,
this reign of God,
this reign of Christ the King is one of more,
it is one that extends beyond
the boundaries of time.



Most of you know this,
but it isn't likely
that John the gospel writer
or John the disciple
and John,
stuck on the island of Patmos
and author of Revelation
are the same person.

But John of Patmos uses
John the gospel writer's theology
to get his point across.
John the gospel,
starts out with a theological affirmation
that pushes out past
the limitations of time:
"In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
²He was in the beginning with God.
³All things came into being through him,
and without him
not one thing came into being."

So, as John of Patmos starts out with,
“Grace to you and peace
from him who is
and who was
and who is to come...”

Christians in the 7 churches
that Revelation addresses,
would hear and understand
that though they are under a Roman empirical rule,
there is something far greater
there is something more
at work on their behalf.

John of Patmos goes on
using royal images declaring,
“and from the seven spirits who are before *his throne*,
⁵and from Jesus Christ,
the faithful witness,
the firstborn of the dead,
and the ruler of the kings of the earth.”

Can you hear the echoes
of how this Lord,
this king,
this ruler of heaven
is different than the kings
and rulers and lords of earth
who are born and die
and only pass on
their names and fancy oil portraits?

Jesus sits on a throne
where time collapses
and at the same time
he is the witness
who existed in time and history,
which makes his reign perpetual, ongoing.

We could get lost in the semantics of it all,
because existence is a term
that cannot be separated,

by definition,
from the concept of time.
But that is for another day.



So, let's talk not just time,
but also, story.

Here we sit, firmly in time and place,
on Sunday, November 21,
in the year two thousand twenty-one;
here we sit in the midst of
our ongoing Christian story
but at what looks like an end.

But is it really the end
or the beginning?

Revelation is apocalyptic literature,
an unveiling—it is formed as a visionary text,
one that offers
a glimpse into the heavenly realm
where all designations of past, present, and future
are all experienced at once
which is in sharp contrast
to the earthly realm here
where the corruption
of past, present, and future *reign*.¹

We don't live
under the imperial thumb of Rome
anymore.
So why celebrate Christ the king?

¹ Thomas Long, *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Vol. 4, Proper 29, Revelation 1:4b-8; Exegetical Perspective* (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY) 2009, pg. 327

Because “The empire that threatens
the heart of Christians today
[is] commercialism,
self-indulgence,
and [now more than ever] increasing isolation
...we are literally thirsting
and hungering for the words,
“grace and peace.”²

Liz Forney calls these words
smelling salts to awaken those of us
who have lost ourselves
under the dominion of those empires.



Revelation, though enigmatic
and fraught with misconception,
offers hope and good news
to us who live
in the realm of empire and time.

The living of day to day
where the troubles of life can overwhelm;
where the day to day
can be mundane and often mediocre;
where life's moments
can be joyful and heartbreaking
—John's Revelation tell us of a king
who is, 'the firstborn of the dead
and the ruler of the kings of earth,'
and this signals that Jesus' resurrection in the past,
is the first act
in the creation
of a holy people

² Elizabeth B. Forney, *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Vol. 4, Proper 29, Revelation 1:4b-8; Pastoral Perspective* (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY) 2009, pg. 326, 328

whom death cannot destroy in the present.³

That bears repeating.

The resurrection of Christ
by the God who was,
and is and is to come,
is the first act in the creation
of a holy people
whom not even death cannot destroy.

Could this mean

that the beginning of the story
isn't just the babe born under a shining star,
but the beginning
was also disguised
as what seemed like his life's end?

Living into this kingdom,
living under the reign of Christ the King
means trusting
that there is abundantly more to the story.

There is more than empire.

There is more than linear time.

There is more than what we experience here and now.

With the Lord God [who was and is and is to come]
there is always more,
more transformation to come to the earth
than has yet been seen,
more power and authority
than [can be claimed]
by earthly kings and empires,
more for God's people⁴...

There is always more to the story.

³Long, pg. 331

⁴Jane Fahey, Feasting on the Word: Year B, Vol. 4, Proper 29, Revelation 1:4b-8; Theological Perspective (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY) 2009, pg. 326



Our Revelation passage ends
with a summons to us
from long ago beginnings
and blankets us with ancient endings.

Echoing God's first appearance to Moses,
[when the call of God's people began]

John uses, "I am" language:

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God,
who is and who was
and who is to come,
the Almighty.⁵

Indeed, we find the promise that
God is our beginning and our ending.
In the words of our confession,
A Brief Statement of Faith,
we are assured that
'in life and in death
we belong to God.'⁶

So maybe that's the whole story
Beginning and ending,
middle parts and the ongoing ones.
... maybe that's all we need to know of the story period.

Amen.

⁵ Forney, pg. 330

⁶ Forney, pg. 330