

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; (pause) 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: the first statements of each of our readings this evening. One from Isaiah, one from Revelations. You would be forgiven if you couldn't remember which was which. What appropriate readings for the end of the last day of the year in the hope of better year in 2026. What a year it has been!

Even as I write this homily I am hard pressed to think of good news associated with this year now ending. Yes there is a truce in Gaza – although since I am writing this on December 23rd, I cannot feel sure that it will still be true by the time you hear this 8 days hence. Even with the truce, there is nothing but abject misery in Gaza. The war in the Ukraine grinds on, as does the civil war in Sudan, today the Globe and Mail published a story that fully 25% of Canadians experience food insecurity. If you were in church on Sunday last, you will have heard me report that fully 14% of the world's population is displaced from their homes, and in many cases their home countries, by war, famine, crime, ethnic or religious persecution, unnatural disasters caused by climate change. The number displaced as internal and external refugees has never been higher in human history. The numbers I cited on Sunday were as of mid-2025. Everything suggests that the number will be even greater tonight as the year ends. If all that is not bad enough, rich countries around the world, including our own, are looking to bar refugees and even to expel some already resident. So much for the rich shall be sent empty away.

We desperately need a new heaven and a new earth in the new year that begins less than 6 hours from now. And that is what the authors of the 3rd section of Isaiah promise writing in the mid 6th century before the common era and what the Apostle John wrote toward the end of the 1st century of the Common Era. The two readings approximately 7 centuries; and in John's later case roughly 1,930 years ago. There wasn't much progress in the time between 3rd Isaiah and John and you would be the Pollyanna to end all Pollyannas if you claimed that we have done much better in the nearly 2000 years since John wrote Revelation.

So how do we understand these two passages written so far apart, but quite equally offering a glorious vision that is yet to be realized?

Well we can begin by thinking of time. Think of the statement in Second Peter chapter 3, verse 8: *But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day.* God's sense of time is not our time. Just as God's sense of place is entirely different than ours. God is everywhere and in everything. We are in one place and one place only. We can be in many places, but only one at a time. So God is in all time and every time. The big bang which arguably set off the whole process of creation was 13.8 billion years ago. God was there! So prophecies that span centuries for us are near immediate for God.

Unless you have a happy invasion of young people this evening, all who usually attend Evening Prayer are well past the first blush of youth. Think of how our perception of time has changed as we

have aged. When I was a young child, I thought an afternoon was interminable. Now a year seems like a month seemed when I was 21. Most of us back in the '40s, '50s, or '60s, in elementary school, marvelled at how ancient we would be when the century changed. At seven or 8 when I contemplated that I would be 47 when 2000 came, it seemed to me that was as far in the future as dinosaurs walking the earth was in the past. Now, I suspect many of you, like me are astounded that we have completed the 1st quarter of the 21st century. Which points out another difference in perception of time between us and God. Most of us would admit that having lived through the first quarter of the 21st century, we are unlikely to be around for the dawn of the third quarter. Indeed, I very much hope I shan't experience the third quarter. We live in biologic time and our biology is time limited. We are finite people. God is infinite.

It seems to me that the prophecies you heard this evening from Isaiah and the Revelation of the Apostle John are about possibilities. For God, a new Jerusalem is possible but it will require a new creation. That new creation could be with us if we commit to re-creation. If we believe that we are made in the image of God and act like it, who knows what will be possible. And let us be clear acting as though we are made in the image of God does not mean we Lord it over anyone or anything. Jesus showed us the way: from Matthew's Gospel, *You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.*

While I began this homily with a recitation of desperate, horrific events, it is powerfully important to remember that there are countless new mini New Jerusalem's even in the worst circumstances. There is a New Jerusalem every time people serve as Jesus served without regard to cost to themselves, without expectation of reward. Think of the aid workers in relief camps, on front lines, digging through rubble with no guarantee that bomb won't go off. Think of caregivers in our own community who work long hours for low wages. Think of all the volunteers who work for good. They live in the new heaven and the new earth. Isaiah says: *for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people....* In the midst of all the horror there is joy and delight because there are people who are a delight because they serve as God asks of them.

And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; This is, of course, from Revelation. But Isaiah says something similar, check it out. What does it mean? I would suggest it means the new heaven and the new earth are one and God will dwell among us. No more pie in the sky when you die. We are charged with working with God to make heaven right here on earth right now! There is no time to waste.

Amen, Every best wish for a really New Year.