

Love in New Jerusalem
5th Sunday of Eastertide + New Jerusalem #2
May 19, 2019
Trinity Bixby
Rev. Lucus Levy Keppel

[Revelation 21:1-6 \(CEB\)](#)
[John 13:31-35 \(VOICE\)](#)

Opener:

Yes, friends – that was Oscar Peterson’s “Hymn to Freedom,” being performed by the 2019 choir of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Bixby, Oklahoma. That’s going to wrap up the 21st century review – but don’t go anywhere! It’s the top of the hour, and that means it’s time for your Life in New Jerusalem memoir, with your host, Lucus Levy Keppel.

Radio HVN – a revelation of New Heaven and New Earth – at the intersection of *Kairos* and *Chronos*.

This week on Life in New Jerusalem, we’re talking about love. *Agape*, *Ahavah*, *Ai*, *Searc* [shark], *Anurakti*, *Caritas*... love. As we continue to adapt to living at this intersection of God’s time and clock-time, it’s been a struggle – and at times, comedic – trying to figure out how our earthly conceptions of love could reconcile with the reality of being filled with God’s love in New Jerusalem. After all, in the old Earth, only glimpses of God’s love were ever seen. Let’s take a look today at how we got here – and what the people of old Earth got right and wrong on the way.

Even in the days before Abraham listened to God’s call to leave his home and travel across the face of the known world, God was active in revealing Godself to humanity through love. Yet, between Eden and Abraham was a time of people constantly misunderstanding God’s love. Early civilizations believed that God’s love to be primarily romantic, and tried to worship God through a rite called “Hieros Gamos,” or “sacred marriage.” Later, in saving humanity from the great flood, God showed Noah and his family what the love of compassion and peace was supposed to

be, promising all of humanity that God would never destroy them. Even Abraham, though he clearly listened to God's call, still didn't understand everything God asked of him. Abraham feared God and praised God, offered God's messengers hospitality and followed their words – but Abraham did not live in perfect love with God. Story after story in the Bible reveals people getting closer to living in God's love – with Joseph showing compassion and love to his family after they treated him terribly; Miriam leading the people in praising God's unfailing love; Samuel, who despite passing on the warning that a king would not be good for the people, still helped people recognize God's love for all by anointing the first two kings of Israel and Judah; Isaiah, who preached hope and comfort in the midst of terrifying exile; Esther, who helped the Persians understand God's love; Micah, who reminded the people that God wanted their love, not just ritual – the list goes on and on.

Yet, of course, the clearest example of God's love was exhibited in Jesus life and ministry. When Jesus tells his disciples to love each other as Jesus loved them, he was telling them that Godly love was possible for humans. That, despite all the mistakes that humans of the old earth made, grace allowed for their love to shine through. Not only that, but showing God's love for each other would become a part of their very identity. It can be hard for us in New Jerusalem to remember, but before we were surrounded by God's loving presence, it was rare for a person's identity to be connected with the love of God. Yet, this identification of Christians with love was not to last. Listen to these words of Elisabeth Johnson, from the early 21st century:

We disciples of Jesus have continually fallen far short in our love for one another as well as in our love for those outside the community of faith. Theological and ethical arguments often descend into personal attacks and name-calling; personal interests often trump the common good of the community; those in need of compassion find judgment instead.

Jesus could not be clearer: It is not by our theological correctness, not by our moral purity, not by our impressive knowledge that everyone will know that we are his disciples. It is quite simply by our loving acts -- acts of service and sacrifice, acts that point to the love of God

*for the world made known in Jesus Christ.*¹

Of course, this is not an idea unique to the 21st century. Augustine, bishop of Hippo in the 4th Century, is credited as writing: “What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of humans. That is what love looks like.”² Once again, it about the actions that people take – in helping those who need it, in connecting and building relationships beyond family and close friends.

Here in New Jerusalem, of course, there are no poor and needy, because we are supplied with all that we need. There are no tears, not because we feel nothing, but because we are not sad. Grief is gone from our lives, since everyone who ever was is here together! Yet, that does not mean that love as Augustine described it is gone from our lives – we still have hands to help others. Now, that love is expressed through creating together, just as God delights to create together with us. The hope of this was expressed in Proverbs 8, when Wisdom delights in creating with God, from the depths of the world to the heavens above. Now, we too are co-creators.

Speaking of co-creators, I should take a moment to thank those people who have helped with the program today: Vincent Arishvara, Melissa Krabbe, and Will Westerfield. They took time out of their busy lives to record their voices. Without them, this wouldn't have been nearly as much fun. Additionally, I collaborated in conversation with my grandfather Lucian Theodore - and my great-grandfather Charles John.

You see, generations of artists, who never could work together in the Old Earth, are together finding joy in learning each others' techniques, and styles. With no limits on material or space, sculptors are attempting work that could never be dreamed of before – and some theatrical work involves an entire half of the city at a time. Those who in life were teachers or preachers are finding time to study whatever they want. In this, there's nothing filled with more love and joy than

¹ Working Preacher: https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2830

² The earliest quote I can find for this is Lloyd Cory in Quote, Unquote (1977)

seeing people from all around the world and all across time build on each other's work.

Part of being co-creators is the constant connection. Love of God and each other means each and every other. When John of Patmos wrote the book of Revelation, he saw the seas as a symbol of disconnection. For him, on the island of Patmos, the seas separated him from his loved ones. Not only was it an ancient sign of chaos and distress, it physically blocked him from communication with his far-flung family. As the centuries passed after his writings, the seas became less and less significant in their obstruction of communication and travel. Indeed, by the 16th century, people were able to move more rapidly across the water than they could on land – and with the invention of air travel and radio in the early 20th century, the seas were no longer a significant obstacle to communication. But, despite communication traveling great distances, people still needed to understand each other – and that required respect.³ Until the divine connection to God and each other was fully realized, that needed respect was often shrugged aside for petty cares and selfish reasons.

Some people understood that need for respect on a deep level. For instance, when the Celtic people in the 5th and 6th centuries read in the Bible that “In God was life, and the life was the light of all people”⁴ and that “it is in God that we live and move and have our being,”⁵ they understood that God's presence filled everyone they met, to a greater or lesser extent. God's heartbeat pulsed through the world, stronger in some than others, but always there. The key was listening for God's heartbeat – knowing it was already there, and really listening for it in other people. In this way, the Celtic Christians had glimpses of what love in New Jerusalem is like – an understanding that we are all with God, and God is with us. When people put this into practice, and really listened to each other for how God was moving in their lives, it was amazing what they could accomplish even then.

³ <https://taleings.blogspot.com/2019/05/love-and-prayer.html>

⁴ John 1:4

⁵ Acts 17:28

Love in New Jerusalem, then, is like Agape Love has always been. Filled with respect for the abilities and wisdom of each other. Building connections among people and God. Joyful at the opportunity to create together with others. Giving without expecting in return – and receiving without shame.

Praise God, whose love abides in New Jerusalem. Praise Christ, who showed us the Way of Love, even in the Old Earth. Praise the Spirit, who connects us lovingly to God and each other. Amen.