

We turn now to reading from the New Testament book of Revelation. The book of Revelation is a book that scares a lot of people. In fact it was very controversial whether or not the book of Revelation should be included in our biblical canon. When the Bible was put together lots of people did not think that this book should have been included.

The book of Revelation has been used to create an entire genre of apocalyptic end of the world scenarios that has made some people a lot of money. Some people have made lots of money as they have given us fearful interpretations of the future wrath of God bringing the end to human civilization. These people have plucked verses out of books like Revelation and have applied these biblical images to modern day people and events.

But the book of Revelation is a book written by a Christian undergoing great persecution from the leaders of the Holy Roman Empire about 30 to 50 years after the death of Jesus. People were being killed for their faith and the Christians were worried about the future.

Using imagery which only his community could understand, the writer John wrote down a vision of a new day when it would be clear that the good of God triumphed over the evil of Satan and the Holy Roman Empire.

Read Revelation 21:1-6a

This past week I was able to witness the contrast between what death and new life looks like in terms of specific places in this community. The first place I want to talk about is Carolina Crossings Golf Club. Carolina Crossings Golf Club is located about 5 miles from here just off Hwy 161 near the town of York.

In the 15 years that I have lived here I have watched the Carolina Crossings Golf Club close and then reopen with a lot of new investment. It was about 10 years ago that someone bought the club and invested money in the course and the clubhouse and tried to run it as a legitimate golf course. It was no River Hills but it was in decent shape. But then it is my understanding that it was sold again and over the past few years the course has been going through a slow downward slide.

I played the course last month in a little golf tournament that I was invited to play in. Our team came in second. As I played the course and walked around in the clubhouse I felt that day that the course was probably going to close any day. So how can one tell when a business is about to close?

The first thing that comes to one's attention is that people no longer care about its appearance. For this golf course it meant that the course and clubhouse was no longer being maintained. In places that are dying there is no sign of new life and activities.

People just don't care anymore about keeping something alive if they think that it is already dying. You see that in golf courses and you see that in churches. Nobody wants to invest in something that people think is in the process of dying.

Not surprising to me the Carolina Crossings Golf Course closed a few weeks ago. And what is really interesting about Carolina Crossings is that when the course closed everything has been left just like it was on the last day that it was open. The flags are still in the holes on the greens. The tee markers are still on the tees.

You can walk around the course today and it's rather creepy because it looks like a golf course but it's not really a golf course. You can walk around it and sense its history but you can see no future. Because anyone can see that the future of that land is no longer as a golf course but as something else. Something that has not been determined.

In contrast to Carolina Crossings, I want to share what happened at the Session meeting in this church this past Sunday. The Session meeting here on Sunday also focused a lot on the history of this place but there was a very different feel. When we on Session talked about the history of Allison Creek we were also talking about the future of Allison Creek.

At the Session meeting on Sunday we got to visit with Spenser Simrill, Jr. who had come to the meeting from Athens, GA where he is a professor of creative writing and videography at the University of Georgia. Yes, some good things do occasionally come out of UGA. Spenser shared with Session about a documentary that he is working on filming that traces the history of the families that started Allison Creek Church. His family, the Simrills, was one of these families.

Spencer is tracing the history of the Scotch Irish who migrated to this area of South Carolina and started this church. He is also tracing the history of the African Americans who were enslaved here and then left this land after the Civil War and migrated to Liberia.

Spencer will be traveling to Scotland and Ireland to interview descendants of our church families there and he will be traveling to Liberia to interview descendants of our church families there. These Scotch-Irish families and these Liberian families are all connected to us here at Allison Creek. Those European families and African families have common ancestors buried on the land that makes up the 23 acres of this church.

And what is exciting about all of this is how our history here at ACPC is helping to guide our future. Because at that same Session meeting we heard from Patrice Gaines who is helping us with our stewardship process. Patrice has felt called to this place to help us celebrate our history and land and how we are part of a much bigger story.

Patrice will be working with us over the next few weeks and leading worship on November 22nd where she will try to help us understand the wealth that God has given us through this land and through our history. The way we are in the process of understanding and giving witness to our history is giving us a vision of God's will for the future of this place.

The stories found in the two cemeteries on this 23 acres of church property and the trails and prayer stations that we are in the process of building are stories which are so much bigger than any of us. We here at Allison Creek have been given a wealth of historical resources that will allow us to give witness to the much bigger story of God's salvation through Jesus Christ.

When John of Patmos recorded his vision in Revelation of a new heaven and a new earth there was no way he could understand what that meant. He lived during a time when Christians were being slaughtered all over the place for their faith. But John did not look at the present as a reason to be discouraged. He instead saw the present and was able to move outside of that and see the world through the eyes of God who promises a new heaven and a new earth.

No matter whatever challenge you may be facing right now in your life we are invited to see that God is always creating new heavens and a new earth. We are invited to live in the present with a sense of the future where God is revealed even clearer than God is revealed today.

Today we are invited to share in Holy Communion which is one way that we are reminded that God is the God of yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

As John reminds us in Revelation, God is Alpha and Omega, beginning and end.

God redeems our histories and makes all things new. AMEN.

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-Given: Nov. 1st, 2015 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)