Last Sunday of the Church Year

Revelation 21:1 – 7

The New Heaven and the New Earth
1Then 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. 2And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."
5And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." 6And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. 7The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

Taking leave is not easy. When a child leaves the family home, when a person must leave their home after many years in order to move into a care facility, and above all when a loved one dies, it strikes us in the heart. It hurts to say goodbye. People, homes, and experiences become dear to us. In the end, they become part of us and part of what makes us who we are. And when we have to say goodbye, something within us dies. That is hardly bearable.

And yet, saying farewell is part of being human. We all know it: our life in this world is limited. But even that thought is difficult to bear, and so we usually push it aside. Even more unfamiliar and frightening is the thought that our world itself is not eternal. It has a beginning, and it has an end.

The necessity of saying goodbye is not only painful and frightening. It also presses upon us the question: Is there something behind the scenes that we cannot see? In fact, the unseen world belongs to our existence just as much as the visible one. A cat feeling around a mouse hole for a mouse must rely on senses other than sight. And we, too, know that there are things we cannot see, even though they are there.

The Apostle John, who wrote the book of Revelation lived between two worlds: the world of things that could be seen and the world of things that could not be seen. On the one hand, there was the visible world, full of suffering and evil powers. His eyes had witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus and the Church of Jesus, which was also enduring bitter persecution. John, too, had to say goodbye again and again to what he loved.

But John lived between the worlds. God had lifted the curtain for him so that he could look behind the scenes and see the reality that was not visible to everyone. And it is precisely this unseen world that John wants to reveal to our eyes. He especially wants to do this when the world, with all its great suffering, presses in upon us and threatens to take away our hope and our faith.

And what John sees is a new world.

John knew nothing of atomic wars or climate disasters. And yet he knew exactly what causes the destruction of the world. What ultimately ruins our lives is what is within us. Human-made disasters take many forms. But in the end, they all lead back to the same source: the Garden of Eden, where humanity freely chose to leave God. Human beings place themselves above God. They want to decide for themselves what is good and evil. This is not merely an issue from long ago; it is a constant issue, and none of us is exempt from it.

By our own strength, we cannot break out of this framework. And that is precisely why we are so sick, suffer so deeply, and must weep again and again because we have so much to lose.

John saw a new world. God granted him this vision on Patmos. But in reality, John had seen this new world much earlier. He encountered it in Jesus.

Jesus Himself is this new world in person. He approached those who mourned and those who were sick. He comforted and healed them in order to show them: your world is not trapped within the narrow walls of your suffering. There is something more.

Jesus speaks forgiveness. He grants a new beginning and a new home. Most clearly, Jesus demonstrates this on the cross, where he bears the sin of the world and promises the thief beside him: “Today you will be with me in Paradise.” And He confirms all of this through His resurrection on the third day.

In this way, Jesus is the victor over death, over sin, and over everything that separates us from God. He is the door to our new home. And even today he calls out to us:

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

John had understood this long ago. But now, on the island of Patmos, he is granted another vision, which he shares with us. He sees the New Jerusalem and the new world.

This new world is completely different from the world we know today. There, there will be no more tears of farewell. God himself will wipe them away. And all of this is possible only because God Himself will create the world anew.

“Behold, I am making all things new!” He says.

Incidentally, this is also the verse of the year for 2026.

To understand what makes this new world so different, we must return once more to the Garden of Eden. What makes the world we know today so evil is humanity’s separation from God. What makes the new world so special is that we will then see God face to face, and He will be very near to us. His presence will permeate everything.

Through Jesus, John had already experienced part of this new world, and so had his brothers and sisters in the faith. We extend our hands to them, for we too experience the living presence of our Lord Jesus in Holy Communion and when we hear His Word.

But we also know the other reality. The new world is not here yet. Our faith is shaken. We do not always feel faith; sometimes we even feel the opposite. And at times we do not understand God's Word spoken to us.

All of that will disappear in God's new world.

God will permeate everything. He will dwell among us in a hut, literally in a tent. A tent has thin walls and no doors. God is accessible at all times. And everything that separates us from God will have vanished.

John saw all of this, and he was told to write it down for the comfort of the church of his own time and for us as well. For all that we will one day see and experience in heaven can already be experienced now, though only in part.

The walls between us and God are already thin here. They are thin when we come to Holy Communion and receive Christ bodily. And the Holy Spirit is not merely a feeling, but God Himself entering into our lives, not merely offering consolation but truly comforting us.

That gives us courage, and it gives us strength.

John lived between the worlds. On the one hand, he clearly saw the destruction, hatred, and suffering of Christians. And from precisely that situation, God opened his eyes to the new world.

In the same way, God encourages us.

There are difficult things in our lives. There are burdens that we cannot easily overcome. Perhaps even bitterness, or feelings that have died within us. John shows us that we are living in the second-to-last reality. The final reality, God's new world, still lies ahead of us.

In that we place our hope.

Amen.