

Sermon – New Creation (SC)  
30<sup>th</sup> October 2022

**What's New about the New Creation**  
**Revelation 12 - 22**

How many definitions or uses can you think of for the word “arm”? – We may think here of our limbs, but we may also think of “arm” in the sense of a sidearm, a weapon.

What about the word “bark”?

This term we have been thinking about creation. And we have traced this theme right through the Bible. And as we have done so, we have seen that “creation” too is a word with more than one meaning. In the Bible, the word “creation” is used in at least three ways.

1. Creation as God's handiwork, something made by him, and for him. Here, we might think of the first 2 chapters of Genesis, where God creates for his own sheer pleasure. And just as laughter is the bubbling over of our joy, so too creation is the bubbling over of God's fullness. So Creation is God's handiwork.
2. But the bible refers to creation in a second sense as well, in which it refers simply to the natural world. And it is in this sense that creation reminds us of our duty to our planet, or rather, God's planet. And it was St Paul who encouraged us to look around at the natural world and to see in its brokenness a confirmation that all is not as it should be. He says, *all creation waits and groans, yearning for the restoration of the sons and daughters of God*. Creation refers to the natural world.
3. But this anticipates the third way the Bible talks about creation. Creation is the sphere in which God acts to rescue his people. Or put more simply, it is where God sent his Son Jesus. Creation is where Jesus goes, and what he rescues.

Creation is God's handiwork, it is the natural world, and it is the place God sent his son to restore. And just when we think we have managed to get a handle on the three meanings of creation in the Bible, we then get to the book of Revelation.

Now to be fair, I often think of the books of the Bible “I wish I knew this better”, but I feel that in a special sense with the Book of Revelation.

Now just in case you didn't know, Revelation is the very last book of the Bible, written by one of Jesus' disciples called John. Revelation is really John's vision of the future, a glimpse into the things that are to come. The spiritual culmination of all history. And its major themes include:

Challenging and encouraging the church  
Worship and the glory of God  
Tribulation  
Judgement  
Recreation or New Creation

And our reading today speaks of this last theme. New Creation.

So here's a question for the theologians among us this morning: Is our reading today a picture of restoration or renewal? Is God repairing, or remaking creation? Is God recycling or starting again?

And to make progress here, we need to begin by asking, "what's new about the new creation?" "what's new about the new creation?"

Let's listen again to the first verse of our reading today:

*Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth [the first order] had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.*

Now what has the apostle John got against the sea here? Well, it might help to know that John wrote this book while in political exile on a small island called Patmos. And he may well have looked out each day at that tempestuous stretch of water in the Aegean, and seen it as something keeping him captive. In any case, the sea in the rest of the book of Revelation is a symbol, it is something chaotic which never rests, which gives birth to monstrous forces of opposition and attack.

So John's vision here, of a new heaven and earth without a sea, is a vision of a new order without chaos.

Now I dare say, that as each of us has watched the news these past two weeks, and as we have seen events unfold at number 10 Downing Street, we have started to anticipate, to hope for a new order without chaos and disruption. But more poignantly, and more painfully, each of us also knows the chaos and disruption of sin, at a personal level. And we long for a time when our lives will no longer be plagued by temptation, addiction, anger, or hurt. We pray that these trials will pass away. We know too that evil is a real and active force in our world, and equally, we long for a time beyond such suffering.

Our struggles with sin, and our suffering under the yoke of evil, propel our hopes forward to a time beyond such things, where they have passed away.

So what is New about the New creation? – It is a time and place without sin and evil.

But there's more: What's new about the new creation? Well, as we read on, we discover there is a new Jerusalem.

*I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup> 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' <sup>1b</sup> or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

And I am going to skip ahead here to verse 22

*<sup>22</sup> I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. <sup>23</sup> The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. <sup>24</sup> The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it. <sup>25</sup> On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there.*

Those of you who are familiar with the Old Testament will know that worship was mediated through the temple in Jerusalem. It was the cultural and religious centre of ancient Israel. It was a symbol, that stood as a mediating point of contact between God and his people.

Now let me take you back to about April and May of 2020. We are in the midst of the first national lockdown, and we are all coming to terms with the fact that all our relationships are now mediated by one type of screen or another. We learned how to use ZOOM, or Skype or video call to stay in touch with our friends. We were glued to our TV screens each Thursday evening for an update from the then Prime Minister. All our relationships were mediated by a third party.

Now remember the moment you could meet with people face to face again. Remember what it was like to interact with other people without the frustration of ZOOM, and asking the standard questions like, "have you unmuted your microphone" and "you need to start video." Our relationships were no longer mediated. We were present, in the room. We could be Close.

This too is the promise of the New Creation, where the New Jerusalem has no temple. And presumably, No ZOOM, no Skype. Because God will be present to his people. The New Jerusalem has no temple, because God himself is in the midst of his people.

So, what's new about the new creation? It is envisioned as a time and a place where suffering and evil have passed away, and where God is present to his people.

Now, there is a final symbol to explore. In his vision, John is invited to walk through the streets of the new Jerusalem where he sees a river and a tree of life. And we can't help but be reminded of the imagery in the Garden of Eden right at the beginning of the story, in the beginning of the Bible.

And so we are left thinking, is the New Jerusalem a city or a garden?

Back in 1920, Ebenezer Howard founded a new city in England. Having experimented with town development in Letchworth, he called the creation of planned towns that were to combine the benefits of the city and the countryside and to avoid the disadvantages of both. It was designed to be 'The Perfect Town'. This new city, was of course, Welwyn City Garden.

Now, before you go home and start telling everyone the Vicar says heaven will look a lot like Welwyn City Garden, the point here is that John, like Ebenezer Howard, was trying to join

together the benefits of two environments. John wants to join together the symbolism of unspoiled perfection of the Garden of Eden, and the glory of the city of Jerusalem.

And in John's vision the throne of God is the source of power which sustains and heals his people. Here, authority is not a threat, but a point of communion.

Creation is God's handiwork, it is the natural world, and the place he sent his Son to rescue.

But New Creation is a time and place beyond evil, where God is present to his people, where he sustains and heals.

May this vision of the future inspire us to live as citizens of the New Creation here and now.