



# The New Heaven and the New Earth

SCRIPTURE:  
Revelation 21:1-6

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April 11, 2021 — Sermon by Rev. Sally Wright

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**O**kay. So it happened. Easter 2021 was last week. We proclaimed, “He is Risen!” We sang, “Jesus Christ is Risen Today” with all of the alleluias. Do you feel different? Do you feel transformed?

If you watched the Village Church Daily Devotional on Holy Saturday (the Saturday before Easter Sunday), I asked listeners if they were ready—ready for God to transform every molecule of the whole world into God’s new heaven and new earth. I heard from many of you—that you hoped you were ready.

Now we are a week out and I wonder: Do you still feel that same energy? The palpable energy, the anticipation, the hope that this year you will see how God turned us into God’s new creations. This year, humanity will be different; I will be different. This year, we will live as if there is no more mourning, no more crying. This year, there will be an end to poverty, racism, polemic political speech, and death will really be no more. Is this that year?

These are questions that Christians from the very beginning have wrestled with. They would celebrate Christ’s rising from the grave. New believers would get baptized into the faith. Since around the third century, the week after Easter was the week that new believers to the Christian faith would attend church *every day*. Each day, they would worship, pray, sing, and most importantly, learn how to live as Christ’s new creation. Those who were more mature in the faith would get a refresher on how to live as Christians. It is as if the powerful energy of being a new creation would permeate the Christian community—charging it with certain knowledge—that if God can rise Christ from the grave, then sure enough God can and would change this world and each

individual.

But you see, God transforming the new Christians was not like showing up for 4-year-old soccer when, at the end of the season, everyone gets a participation trophy. No, this was transformation from the core of one’s being, the fabric of one’s own understanding of themselves and their worldview. God was transforming them into ones who understood that the truth is that God can and does resurrect Jesus Christ. And, therefore, the powers of oppression that restrict us in the world can be overturned.

The end of the book of Revelation is not talking about God’s new heaven and new earth coming without long, hard-fought heartbreak and worldview-changing work. We are not just Easter people. We are also the people who know Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. We know that God can use betrayal, sleeping disciples, even an instrument of death to bring about God’s new heaven and new earth.

But, Sally, how can you be so certain? You hear the news of mass shootings; you hear of ways the earth is being scarred. Sally, you are a pastor of pastoral care. I have told you about my deepest heartbreaks. How on earth can you stand there and tell me that God can still resurrect, and that God can and does conquer the power of sin and has the last word on death?

You see, I have stood face-to-face with the deepest heartbreaks of this world. I have stood with you in many of them.

A pastor friend of mine told me a story from this past summer. This was at the height of the Black Lives Matter protests. A church member called her to inform her that the pastors’ and church’s support of Black Lives Matter was causing her both anger

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and confusion. They agreed to meet and discuss in person. What happened over the course of three conversations was a transformation. Through thoughtful, honest, and vulnerable discussions, these two were able to explore issues of race and racism, the helpful and hurtful responses of the past, and potential ways to participate in anti-racism work in real, authentic ways in their own community. The conversations transformed both the pastor and the church member into God's new creations.

The earth can continually be transformed into God's new earth as well. Amy Stross gives us a glimpse of this. She, along with hundreds of thousands other permaculture practitioners worldwide, are transforming their tiny plots of suburban earth into ones that produce more than they consume. She turned her tenth-acre suburban lawn into a fruit- and vegetable-producing micro-farm that supplied enough food to incorporate into half of their family's meals. Changing just her own front yard into a fertile, food-producing farm, she began to reduce the use of pesticides, food waste, and trips to the grocery store. In turn, she increased the microbial life in the soil, soil tilth, and attracted diverse pollinators to her garden. And perhaps most importantly, supplied fresh fruit and vegetables to her and her neighbors' tables. With each turn of the compost and each change of the season, her land is one step closer to the abundance of God's new earth.

Another story ringing in my head is the story of Vanessa—when sometimes becoming God's new creation does not turn out the way we expect. I met Vanessa in ICU room A7 in Austin, Texas. She never knew me as her chaplain, at least the way that you and I know each other. When I met her, she had been released from jail just one day prior, had decided to have one dose of drugs, and overdosed. What she didn't know was that you if you have been clean, you can't use the same dose you did before; you must start with a smaller dose. So, in that ICU room, she had a tube breathing for her and a cap on her head measuring every electrical pulse her brain put out.

Her family came in and kept telling me her sto-

ry—how she was doing so well, how she had really turned her life around, how this was not fair, and to pray for a miracle. Then, all the tests came in. This was not going to be the miracle where Vanessa walked out of the hospital healed. So, her family called in their family priest. Fifteen of us crowded in that tiny ICU room while the priest prayed, anointed, and reminded Vanessa and all of us that transformation into God's new creation does not always look like what we think it should look like. Sometimes it looks like God standing at the bedside saying, "Come home, I love you, I have always loved you. I will make you into the new creation now."

I have stood with many of you at death's grave, saying in the face of death itself the same alleluias we say on Easter. Even at the grave, we sing our song—alleluia, alleluia alleluia. It is not easy to proclaim the transformation of Easter in the face of Good Friday's grave.

Becoming God's new creation is no easy task. But what we know is that God is the one who is doing the transforming. God is the one who raised Jesus. God is at work. What does this transformation look like for you? What are you waiting for God to transform: Is it a diagnosis? A relationship that needs to find a new path? Is it your kid taking your heart to deep, terrifying places? Where is it that God needs to step in and provide a new creation for you? Where is the Good Friday looking for Easter Sunday transformation? Where is it that God is making a new creation in your life?

So the work that is ours to do this day and this Easter season is to point out the places where God is creating the new heaven and new earth. We get to testify to the ways that God is transforming each of us and this world into new creations. God sends us out to tell this Good News: that Jesus Christ is risen and our whole worldview has changed. Hope abounds. God can and does transform even the darkest places of this world into God's new heaven and new earth.

In case you missed it, Alleluia! Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.