



**VILLAGE
CHURCH**

Presbyterian (USA)

And His Name Shall Be Everlasting Father

SCRIPTURE:
Revelation 21:1-8

Dec. 17, 2023 – Sermon by Rev. Dr. Rodger Nishioka

The Revelation to John is the last book of the New Testament. In it, the writer, John, tells what God has revealed to him about a vision for the future. Chapter 21 is the penultimate chapter and God shows John a new heaven and a new earth. And John hears a loud voice from heaven that proclaims: “See the home of God is among mortals. God will dwell with them. They will be God’s people and God, God’s own self, will be with them. God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more. See I am making all things new. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. And I will be their God, and they will be my children.”

God promises that “I will be their God. And they will be my children.” When God comes to dwell among us. When God is born among us. God will be our God. And we will all be God’s children.

For unto us a child will be born. Unto us a son will be given. And among his names... he will be everlasting father. When I think of God as everlasting father, I reflect on my own life and how I was truly blessed to have two parents who loved me and loved each other and loved God.

My mother, Alice, was patient and caring and an amazing mother of four boys. In our house, we had a rule. That rule was we boys had to break something every day. It was not a day until we had broken something and these were not just little things. A lamp in the living room. A couch. A wall in our upstairs bedrooms. To this day, in our home in Seattle, there are posters on the wall in odd places because they are covering up a hole in the wall where a foot or a fist or a head went through the wall.

After the last of us moved out, our folks bought new carpet. New furniture. Remodeled the kitchen. We were like, “Hey, this is really nice! How come you

didn’t do this when we were here?” And Mom and Dad would look at us incredulously and say, “Boys, do you not remember what it was like when you were all living here? You used to break a thing a day.” And we were like, “Oh, yeah.”

My Dad, Richard, was pastor of our church, the Japanese Presbyterian Church of Seattle. This is the congregation that taught me to love Jesus and I will forever love them for that.

I was a student at Wilson Middle School while the Seattle schools were trying to integrate. Wilson was in North Seattle which meant that there were not many Black or Asian or Latino kids. Our school was mostly white with mostly white teachers. I was in 7th grade and we had just started studying World War II in social studies and my teacher—who seemed very nice up until this point—turned to me, the only Japanese American kid in the class, and asked, “Rodger, why did your people bomb Pearl Harbor?” I remember sitting there and having no idea what she was talking about. I remember thinking that I had never thought of ‘my people’ bombing Pearl Harbor. Of course it was a terrible thing and my ancestry is Japanese so, I guess, my people did that? I just remember being confused by the question.

Later that afternoon, I was doing homework and Dad came home from church, greeted me and asked how school was. I said, “Fine.” Then I remembered the question from my teacher and I asked him, “Hey, Dad. Why did our people bomb Pearl Harbor?” And he looked at me and said, “What?” Right away, I knew something was wrong but I did not know what, so I just said, “Oh, nothing. Never mind.” But he was not letting this go. “Roddy, what did you ask me?” “Well, um, I was just wondering why our people bombed Pearl Harbor?” “Roddy, what are you talking about?” So I explained meekly, “Well, um, today at school, my teacher asked me why our people

bombed Pearl Harbor and I didn't have an answer... but never mind." Dad looked at me, "Your teacher asked you that?" "Um, yeah, Dad, but never mind." "Roddy, get in the car."

The next thing I knew Dad and I were driving back to Wilson Middle School and I was regretting that I had even brought this up. In fact, I remember telling Dad that I must have gotten the question wrong and misunderstood and we should just go back home but he was not having it. I could tell he was mad, but I wasn't sure if I had done something wrong.

We got to the school and the parking lot was empty. It looked like everyone had gone home—much to my relief—and I was hoping Dad would just forget about it, but we got out of the car and he started walking with me around each of the buildings until he found a door that was open. It was the administrative building and just then the vice principal, Mr. Whiteman (yes, that was his name) was leaving and he looked at us and asked, "Can I help you?" My father said to him, "My name is Richard Nishioka and this is my son Rodger. I am the pastor of the Japanese Presbyterian Church and today he was asked why our people bombed Pearl Harbor."

I was standing there—quiet. Mr. Whiteman dropped his head and sighed. He said, "Hello sir. Hello, Rodger. Would you please come to my office?" And he turned around and opened the door to his office and turned on the lights. We went in and he invited us to sit down. Then Dad said, "Sir, my son Rodger was born in Hawaii. I was born in California. My wife was born in California. My parents were born in California. I am an American. We did not bomb Pearl Harbor. My parents and my sister and I, we were forced from our home in Long Beach, California and sent to an internment camp in Poston, Arizona by our own government. We did not bomb Pearl Harbor."

Mr. Whiteman spoke to me and to my Dad and

said, "Rodger, Rev. Nishioka, I am so sorry. That was a horrible question. It never should have been asked. Of course you are Americans. I will speak to Rodger's teacher and you will have an apology from her and from our principal and I can assure you it will not happen again."

As we drove back home, Dad lectured me about how we are proud to be Americans and not to allow anyone to think that I was not an American or that we did not belong here. I remember nodding and being quiet. At first, I was embarrassed by the whole thing. But years later, I was so grateful. I learned two things that day. First, that Mr. Whiteman was a kind and honorable man; he showed nothing but kindness and respect for Dad and for me. And second, I learned that my Dad will always have my back even when I didn't realize I needed him.

Every child needs to know that. Every child at some point in their growing-up years, needs to know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that they have a parent who has their back and will stand up for them 24/7—no matter what. Everlasting fathers do just that. Every kid needs to know that. And for some of us who did not grow up knowing that, we have spent our lives searching for it.

"See, the home of God is among mortals. God will dwell with them. They will be God's people and God's own self will be with them. God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more."

"See I am making all things new. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. And I will be their God, and they will be my children." I will be their God. And they will be my children.

In a week's time, God is coming to dwell among us. When God is born among us. God will be our everlasting father. And we will all be God's children.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.