

**“What Made God Decide to Live In Heaven
Instead of On Earth?”
January 30, 2011
Grove Presbyterian Church**

Revelation is a beautiful book of even more beautiful hope.

Forget it, please, as some predication forecasting what is to come. We leave such prognostication to the Mayans – who couldn't even predict their own ruin.

The Book of Revelation – literally: visions that have been revealed – describes in dramatic, poetical, and symbolic language, how the same struggles in life occur and recur. Imagine the whole book a Bach Fugue building on a consistent theme toward a crescendo.

What is this crescendo? If God is God, all things must come of God. So how do the visions end? Even heaven and earth, parts of creation, will be made new. Paradise: not merely restored but fulfilled.

Then 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. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”

And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Then 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 water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

I love my three piece suit.

I fully admit I am an antiquarian. Old fashioned. I'm a 1930's kind of guy

But oddly, over the years the material in this pin stripe suit shrunk.

Can't explain it; but, for example, somehow the trouser waistband contracted. Must have been very dry in my closet.

Somehow the suit jacket buttons parted company from each other, like lost friends

But I really needed the suit. Good suit. Expensive suit.
Besides, if you use pocket watches you simply must wear a vest.
Can't stand wearing wristwatches.

Fortunately, my wife suggested the name of a good tailor.
A good tailor can work miracles.
The magic of the seamstress!

Abacadabra!

What was once tight now fits. Maybe still a little snug. But you can only expect so much stretching from cloth.

Yes, alter it to fit me. Alter our clothes. Alter our habitat. Alter our beliefs. Alter the facts. Cut cut, snip snip

Beware Procrustes bed. A robber innkeeper in Greek mythology. Travelers would come and stay at his inn. He'd show them their bed. An iron bed. If too short for the bed, he stretch them till they fit. If too tall, he'd cut off their legs. Either way, he'd make them fit. He'd make them conform.

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Where this gets terribly fascinating and interesting -- here's the really clever bit -- is how we treat people the same way, cutting them to fit us.

I like him. He's smart. He agrees with me.

Or the new wife who looks forward to fashioning her new husband into the man she's convinced he can be.

Or the husband who keeps buying garments for his wife.

Ingenious, aren't we? And persistent as tortoises. Why do we foolishly think stubbornness is a virtue?

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Self-interest can be a mighty motive. Neither should we paste it as always bad. Self-interest is what drives us to forming the social contract, or entering marriage, or desiring children.

Rather hard to separate self-interest out of most things we do. How do you separate out color from a rainbow or salt from the tear?

The real question is: what kind of self-interest?

I do commend to you all the movie, “The King’s Speech.” Recommend that you see it soon. Since it lacks gratuitous sex and violence, it probably won’t last long in the theatre.

Because it is a movie about history, it is a movie for our times. Plus really great suits. It is a movie with weight. Amidst so much today that is trivial or trite or pathetic, it is a movie that carries a voice.

How Bertie, who didn’t want to be king, rose to do what had to be done in trying times.

How two persons in particular helped him realize his potential.

How Bertie, who stammered and stuttered so embarrassingly, overcame his defect with bravery and perseverance and learnt to deliver a speech that rallied a nation at war time.

What is the first line against adversity? It is our character.

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Sin can be defined simply: failing to bring out the divine potential in yourself and others.

Love too can be simply defined: willing and wanting to help your lover become the best he or she can be, for love is the giving of the self so the other flourishes.

Godly love: the giving of the divine self so the other flourishes.

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Which brings us to religion.

Religion has its advantages, and its place, thank you very much. I appreciate it. We create religion mostly to monitor and guide our self-interest.

And to proclaim hope, as did John – the author of the Book of Revelation –for his persecuted congregation, the troubled and suffering people he loved dearly

So, when people poke fun at religion or genuinely disdain it, okay. Much of what they criticize can be justifiable, fair complaints of how we distort religion and how religion can distort our notions of God.

Foreskins.
Flagellation
Polygamy
Jihad
Voodoo
Scientology (enough said...)

Let's be very wary to distinguish between God and religion.

Let's avoid confusing the two.

Let's make a concerted point of refusing to replace one with the other, the former with the latter, the latter with the former. When we equate God with religion and religion with God, that's when things get really freaky. Hello Procrustes.

Putting God in boxes
Limiting God
God is an Englishman
God is Roman Catholic
God is Hindu
God is Muslim
God is Presbyterian

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I am reminded of another movie, "Journey to the Center of the Earth." Pat Boone's character begins a prayer, "O God of earth and heaven..." James Mason's character interrupts him, saying, "Don't limit him, boy; don't limit him." Yet we still try.

Tailoring God to fit us.

Cutting God down to size.

Making God fit the bed of our beliefs.

When it really is quite entirely the other way around. Godness ever active, ever reshaping us to fit God.

*"What Made God Decide to Live In Heaven  
Instead of On Earth?"*

Where does God live?

Where you find truth, God finds you.

Where you find justice, God finds you.

Where you find goodness, God finds you.

Where you find beauty, God finds you.

Where you find love, God finds you.

Seems to me, courtesy of the Spirit of the Christ, God lives on earth as much as in heaven. In heaven as much as inside our very hearts and souls.

Seems to me, God is more when than where.

How else can we flourish?

How else can we, Christ-like, want that all may flourish and become their best?

Who can bind God?