

**REVELATION FOR TODAY:
EMBRACING THE GOD WHO IS**
Revelation 1:4-8

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April 18, 2004

Did you hear about the atheist who was walking through the woods admiring all the accidents of nature when he ran into a 7-foot grizzly bear? The man started running for his life but was soon losing ground. Finally he tripped and fell only to look up and see the bear right over him. In desperation the atheist cried out "O My God." Instantly time stopped, the bear froze, the forest was silent. A bright light beamed over the man and a voice came from heaven saying, "After all these years, am I to count you a believer?" "That would be hypocritical," said the atheist, "but maybe you could turn the bear into a Christian." "Very well" said the voice. The light went out, the sounds of the forest resumed. The bear folded his paws, bowed his head, and said "Lord, for this food I am about to receive, I am truly thankful."

It's confirmation Sunday in the life of our Church. It is a day when over 90 young men and women profess their faith in Jesus Christ and pledge their allegiance to the Church. It is a day when all of us are invited to renew our devotion to God as revealed to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Lest we overlook the significance of moments like this, let me remind you of some recent research I mentioned last Sunday. Sociologist George Barna in his book Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions concludes that:

1. Our moral foundations are in place by age 9.
2. A lasting determination about the personal significance of Christ's death and resurrection is in place by age 12.
3. In essence what you believe by the time you are 13 is what you will die believing.
4. 4/5 of all adult church leaders were consistently involved in children's ministries for an extended period of years prior to age 13.

So in this holy moment, let us all embrace the God who was, who is, and who is to come. From A to Z, from the beginning to the end, let God be God.

WILL YOU EMBRACE THE GOD OF YOUR BEGINNINGS?

The psalmist put it this way: "*You, O Lord, created my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*" There may be accidental conceptions but there are no accidental births. You bear the image of God in your very soul. You are a child of the universe. You are always on God's mind.

That's why it is right and good and a joyful thing that the Church celebrates infant

baptisms. From our beginnings we belong to God. We are not our own, we have been bought with a price. We are not alone. We live in God's world. We bear the mark of his grace on our forehead. We are baptized.

Who can comprehend this infinite God? If we complain that children do not understand what they are doing when they profess the faith are we proposing that we understand the intricacies of God himself and have it all worked out?

J. B. Phillips 50 years ago wrote a wonderful book entitled Your God is too Small. In it he says the problem with us humans is that we want to put God in a box, we want to reduce him down to our size. God made us in his image and we have been returning the favor ever since making God in our image. We turn him into resident policeman, or parental hangover, or grand old man, God in a box. We capture, tame, and train Him to our liking, something that is far too big to be forced into little man-made boxes with neat labels.

God is infinite. We have taken the lion of Judah and turned him into a house cat who will curl up beside the fire with us and purr when we pat his stomach.

Who made the mountains, who made the trees,
Who made the rivers flow to the seas,
Who made the stars in the sky so high?
Somebody bigger than you or I.

It is that infinite God I want you to adore and worship and give yourself to today.

This Lord of the universe invites us to love him with all our hearts, and follow him in all our ways, and worship him with all our being.

The God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the God of Peter and Paul and Mary, the God of Luther and Calvin and Wesley desires a partnership with you for the good of the world.

By faith these saints went out not knowing where they were going. They conquered kingdoms, administered justice, spread the gospel, reformed the Church and gave their lives for the cause of Christ. You are invited to share this exciting adventure.

If parents seem overly anxious about some teenager's belief, it's because they know that one child lost to the faith usually becomes a family lost to the faith, and not many generations later a whole community of unbelief is set into motion because one person went astray. What happens here today has eternal significance. Will you embrace the God of your beginnings?

WILL YOU EMBRACE THE GOD WHO IS PRESENT?

The God who was is likewise the God who is. When Moses asked God to tell him his name so that when he got to Egypt he would have a name to call him to

deliver the slaves. The Lord said "Tell them the 'I Am' has sent you." The God who is calls us to become what we were created to be.

At the tender age of 11, I stood at the altar of a little country church along with five other young people and promised to live a Christian life. My mother thought I was too young. A few friends made fun of me. But with all my heart, I became a disciple of Jesus Christ and that decision has shaped the last 47 years of my life. There were some things I believe back then that I still cling to today:

- my sins are forgiven
- my future is in God's hands
- I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.
- Through the years, there's never been a burden that Jesus did not carry. There's never been a sorrow that he has not shared. Whether the days happened to be sunny or dreary, Jesus has always been there.

No, no, discipleship is not an easy road. Discipleship is sometimes difficult.

Back in 1960 little Ruby Bridges was only six years old when she was singled out to be the first African American to attend an all white New Orleans, Louisiana, elementary school. The angry crowds were so frightening that Federal marshals had to protect her. On days when her mother was not able to go with her, Ruby said later "I walked through the crowds alone, saying my prayers and knew that God would walk with me." No, no it's not always an easy road.

One of these Sundays you are going to get up and your Dad is going to say "It's a pretty day, why don't we all fix a picnic basket and go to the lake. We can ski and swim and float on inner tubes. There will be plenty of other Sundays to go to Church." You are going to have to stand up and say to your parents "But I promised to uphold the church with my presence." That's a lot of pressure on a new believer. But such things happen. I know—parents complain to me about it happening.

The tempter is never far from any of us. The forces of evil are always saying:

- take the cash and let the credit go
- eat drink and be merry for tomorrow you die
- if it feels good, do it
- it's your life, don't let anyone tell you how to live it
- if God is real, why do so many children suffer
- if God is real, why is he so silent?

Don't listen to those voices. Listen to another voice. For greater is he that is in you than he who is in the world. Embrace the God who is, who is present now.

WILL YOU EMBRACE THE GOD WHO HOLDS THE FUTURE?

He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. The God who was, who is and the God who is to come.

Someone tried to surmise how the news media might announce the end of the world. Here were their conjectures:

- Sports Illustrated would run a cover story saying Game's Over
- Ladies Home Journal would run an ad saying "Lose 10 pounds by judgment day with our new Armageddon diet."
- J. C. Penny Catalogue would put out a special edition of their catalog saying Our Final Sale
- America On Line would say the system is temporarily down, try calling back in 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, the Bible announces the end like this:

THE LORD GOD OMNIPOTENT REIGNS FOREVER AND EVER

When the apostle John sits down to write the book of Revelation, Rome has the fragile Christian community in a death grip. Nero is smashing his way through the hopes and dreams of the saints. The second Babylon, the mother of all evil, is drunk on the blood of martyrs. Things are so bad John has to write in an apocalyptic code. But listen to what he says:

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come. Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him. He is the king of kings and the Lord of lords, the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, and he shall reign forever and ever. That is our hope and that is our faith.

No matter how dark the day, we are the people of light. No matter how bad the losses, we are ultimately winners. *For one day every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.*

Since we know the outcome, we can face tomorrow. Because He holds the future, all fear is gone.

Lee Ann Womack has a song that goes something like this:

I hope you never lose your sense of wonder,
You get your fill to eat, but always keep that hunger.
May you never take one single breath for granted.
God forbid love ever leave you empty handed.
I hope you still feel small beside the ocean.
Whenever one door closes, I hope one more opens.
Promise me that you'll give faith a fighting chance
And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance,

I hope you dance.

The people of faith dance because they know the final score. Indeed they do. May the God of the past, the God of the present, and the God of the future, become your God too. That's what matters in the light of eternity. Amen.