

People of New Day (Revelation 21:1-7)

People often say that they are afraid of watching news because there are so many disturbing stories of crimes in the U.S. as well as in the world. In this past week we heard that there was a school shooting in Seattle, gunman attack on Parliament in Canada, and an attack on policeman a man with an axe in New York. The reason why these kinds of incidents are disturbing is because people that died and got hurt are innocent people who didn't cause any harm to anybody. They are innocent teenagers, soldier, and policemen. The fact that these people are exposed to violence makes everyone vulnerable and makes us feel threatened our own security thinking that no one is immune to this kind of violence. People often share their thoughts on how the world is so full of violence and destructive behaviors and corruption that recovery is impossible and things are only getting worse. There seems to be no hope for the world to be a better place to live.

We are not the only ones or the first ones who feel that way. In the history of the human race, and in the bible, we encounter the people who seem to be filled with hopelessness. Moses and his people in the wilderness, the Israelites at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem temple and in the Babylonian exile, even at the time of Jesus, people were suffering and lost hope. Today's scripture comes from one of those times—a time of political turmoil, social instability, religious oppression and persecution. Christians in Asia at the end of the first century had problems to face—they were considered to be a sect that primarily appealed to the lower classes, a sect that had no long history or glorious institutions, a suspect group which met for its cultic practices in private homes on a day which was not a public holiday, that was widely suspect of being unpatriotic because their leader was crucified by the government as a rebel, a group about which wild stories were told and considered as cannibals of eating flesh and drinking blood. They were subject to social and economic discrimination, to more or less constant tensions and harassment, to the kind of mob violence. Such time is difficult to endure without a strong sense of group and personal identity. The pressures of their situation forced the question on them “who are we?”

The answer came from three different directions. First of all it came from “memory.” Their practice of getting together and break the bread reminded them who they were called to be. They were called to be the disciples of Jesus Christ who was sent by God to reveal God's love and died on the cross for the forgiveness of sins and rose from the death to give us eternal life. They were constantly reminded that in Christ they were made new and their old identities were no longer effective to them. In this memory they were reminded again and again how much they were valued by God and Jesus Christ.

Secondly their identity came from “vision.” The passage for this morning is the climax of the vision John narrated in the book of revelation. The vision is about the newly created holy city of Jerusalem descending from heaven. It's not renewed or restored place but is a whole new place like the Garden of Eden, the place all the faithful enter into to live in the presence of the Holy God, the place with no sorrow, no pain, no tears and no death. Ultimately it is the ideal city where God and the faithful live together and no violent or destructive forces can enter into. As 21st century Americans this vision may not as powerful or attractive to us, in the history of Christianity this vision has been the only source of hope and enabled millions of Christians to overcome their harsh reality and environment in life. This vision still inspires and saves the new Christians all over the world.

Third, their identity came from the mission rooted in the vision and hope. Even though they were living in the world of war and terror, because they had the vision of God's peaceful city, their mission was focused on bringing peace to the world that they lived in. even though they were persecuted and oppressed, because they had the vision of God's idea city of no pain and no tears, their mission was focused on wiping people's tears, consoling people that were hurting and living in solidarity with them. Even though they were hated and persecuted, because they had the vision of God who is merciful and forgiving, they were able to provide the act of love and mercy to others.

It is obvious that we are also living in the world where people often experience hopelessness, people experience harsh treatment and threat of violence, living in the cycle of poverty. In the midst of hopeless world, we Christians often feel powerless. But the first century Christians inspires us to affirm our identity as the people with memory, vision and mission. Those who survived the harsh treatment and threat with violence call us not to fall into the deep pit of hopelessness along with others. Rather they call us to be the hope of the world. They call us to be the Holy City of Jerusalem in the world. As a matter of fact we do have everything they had. We come together to remember who we are called to be as the disciples of Jesus Christ through our worship service, remembering our baptism and Christ's love for us through communion, and celebrating the new life in Jesus. We have the vision of New Jerusalem where God creates all things new and we live in his holy presence. In fact whenever we take communion we affirm our faith in the vision by saying "until he comes at final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet." We do have the mission rooted in the vision creating the kingdom of God on earth. Our mission is to cultivate the hope in God and become the instruments of the healing and comfort, peace and justice of God.

Obviously we cannot take away all the tears, all the sorrows and all the pains. We cannot create a place with no death and no pain. We can certainly create a place that people find hope while they are living in fear and hopelessness. It can be a place that people are reminded how much they are loved and valued. It can be a place where they experience that their tears are wiped away while they experience sorrow and pain. It can be a place where everyone that comes in may see the glimpse of the New Jerusalem. It can be a place where everyone is treated as the honored guests and experience the ever flowing love of God, so that they also may have the memory of God, vision of the new Jerusalem and live in the mission rooted in their vision. That's what we are called to live as the disciples of Jesus Christ. Living as disciples is living as the people of the new day. As the disciples we are the hope of the world. As a church, we are the model of the New Jerusalem.