# Walking Over the Rocks and Sea Shells of Life!

Sermon Preached by Rev. Chuck Cole at St. John’s 03/29/2020

# Revelation 21:1-7 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

### The New Heaven and the New Earth

**21** 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. **2** And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. **3** And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+21%3A1-7&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-31041a)] of God is among mortals.

He will dwell[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+21%3A1-7&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-31041b)] with them;

they will be his peoples,[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+21%3A1-7&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-31041c)]

and God himself will be with them;[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+21%3A1-7&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-31041d)]

**4**

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.”

**5** 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.” **6** 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. **7** Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

I grew up in a town on the coast and like many coastal towns my town had a town beach. The beach in the town I grew up in was divided into two parts; one part was maintained it had a smooth sand, a boardwalk, a playground, concession stand and life-guards and lifeguard first aid shack. This maintained part was divided by a wall. The unmaintained part was beautiful, fun to explore, lots of great shells and rocks to collect, seaweed, some tidal pools on the rocks on the jetty that stuck out between the parts of the beach. As kids we would go exploring this part on the beach while our families were largely on the other part. And as kids do sometimes we did not listen to our parents and go back and get our shoes but climbed over the wall without them. You would get part way down the beach and realize the pain is not worth it. If you just made it to the wall the rock and shell free smooth sand awaited you. The feeling when you got over the wall was heaven but you had to keep your eyes on the prize to keep going.

That experience of mine came to me seemed an apt image of what it means in our passage to conquer and so inherit the wonders of the New Heavens and New Earth.

At that same beach the waves were gentle and lapping, the smallest child can walk and not get hurt or knocked down, they produce a peaceful sound and they go in and out revealing hermit crabs etc. You could swim in the water everywhere because there was no riptide or current of significance to concern yourself with. It was in many ways fairly idyllic. Except every once in a while there would be an invasion of Jelly fish - if you have ever been sting by a jellyfish it hurts and every once and a while there would be an occasionally storm that would churn the water and make the waves huge and dangerous.

In our world there are always Jelly Fish and storms and now we are living midst a huge swarm but in the New Heavens and New Earth the Jelly fish will be gone and the storm will never come and there will be no more crying and no more tears and no more death.

The Common English Bible puts verse 7

Revelation 21:7 Common English Bible (CEB)

**7** Those who emerge victorious will inherit these things. I will be their God, and they will be my sons and daughters.

Emerging victorious is continuing faithful to Christ, walking carefully and intentionally over the rocks and shells in life and then at the end emerging ultimately into the new Heavens and New Earth.

The people of God in the Book Revelation have a constant call throughout the book to remain faithful, to confess Christ in words or actions and live with Jesus as Risen Lord, conquering Son, Victorious Messiah. To live with him in word and deed as our Lord and none other. It is to value what he values, love what he loved and to live the fact that our path to life is through death and resurrection.

# Matthew 16:25 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) says

**25** For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

To emerge victorious is to live according to this truth choosing to lose our life - the life this world determines for us - bit by bit for Christ and in the process we gain true life.

I recently read the story of a man who I think personifies this in our moment.

Father Giuseppi Berardelli was a 72 year old Italian priest. He was vibrant and alive and beloved. He came down with the Coronavirus Covid-19 and was hospitalized. A parishioner bought him his own personal respirator and he made the choice to give the respirator to a younger patient so they could live. He died shortly thereafter. He was confronted with the brokenness of Covid-19 and he chose life. Giuseppi Berardelli did not seek out this suffering but in it he was victorious by living confident in Christ and his victory in him.

We as we act like Christ might lose our lives in smaller ways but gain true life while we live this life and in the New Heavens and Earth.

This week I saw a post that the Valley Mission was in desperate need of supplies so I stood in my house looking at our supply of toilet paper and paper towels. Our supply is not hoarder type but adequate to our needs for a while. As I considered how much to give I would look at our supply and I would think what about this much - then a little voice kept wanting me to make it less and less - what if I need it - what if I cannot get anymore - other people will give right. I eventually arrived at what I believe was a faithful amount but that voice was the voice of saving my own life rather than losing it for Christ. It was the voice of holding onto this life and this world instead of giving this life for a Christ to gain true life.

In Every Crisis there is Great Opportunity! - Albert Einstein

We are living now in a time of great opportunity to reevaluate and put in place different practices of life and heart. We are living in a time where we are broken out of our normal routines and so have the opportunity to learn a little bit more to die to ourselves and live for him.

This could be in the giving of paper towels or toilet paper, it could be in filling our minds with scripture rather than something else, it could be creating a habit of prayer that maybe we did not have before, it could be by engaging on Facebook civilly and graciously with others and maybe shed more light, Maybe it is in the strange love of social distancing enforcing a difficult discipline of patience for some of us, maybe it is learning to use new technology to connect and reach people, maybe it is by prioritizing family meals and game nights.

In the midst of this opportunity we also face a difficult reality. The waves are strong at times and they threaten to undo us, the jelly fish stings hurt and the seashells sometimes cut our feet.

Many of us are experiencing a combination of Grief and exhaustion. Events that we had worked hard for and looked forward to are canceled or postponed, we are unable to be physically close to those we love at times of need, meaningful jobs have been stripped away, businesses we have worked to create are threatened, income disappears.

Some of us are experiencing exhaustion as maybe we do not find change as easy as others and we are now experiencing tremendous amounts of change. Many of us are being called into roles and ways of doing things we never would have imagined.

As we seek to walk purposefully and intentionally in this time let us remember John 16:33 which reads

John 16:33 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

**33** I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!”

Also because of this we might not feel very victorious or overcoming. But let us remember Romans 8:35-39

**35** Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? **36** As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all day long;

 we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.”

**37** No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. **38** For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, **39** nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. The Lord the creator of heaven and Earth is our helper and he is actively keeping us making us more and more like him moving us toward victory.

As we walk across the sea shells and rocks of life let us persevere looking forward with confident hope to our blessed inheritance to the beautifully maintained beach on the other side of the wall which we will step into if we persevere. Let us lose out life in this world - the self-centered life this word calls us too and instead live for Christ. Let us keep looking forward and choosing to take the next step toward life trusting fully in his grace. Amen.