

The Mobius Strip
Open Prairie, UCC
Rev. Curran Reichert
November 26, 2006

Rev 1:4b-8 Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

John 18:33-37 Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

When my family moved to Northern CA, I was thirteen. I have told you before how we ended up at the Presbyterian Church in town right? Yeah, it was because of the windows...my parents became Presbyterian because of the windows, now they are Methodist because of the punch, and I am UCC because of the comma...but I became a Presbyterian at the time, for one reason and one reason only. I became a Presbyterian because of these words- spoken at the end of every worship service- by the Rev. Dr. Jimmy Adams in his thick Scottish burrough, "As it was in the beginning, it now and ever shall be, world with out end Amen, and Amen."

I don't think I ever gave much conscious thought to **what** he was saying, I was more interested in **how** he was saying it, but today's scripture plunges into the heart of this seemingly innocent turn of phrase. Today we deal with the Alpha and Omega, the Lord our God who is, and was, and is to come, the Almighty One. Today we come face to face with the Book of Revelation. The Apocalypse!!!!!!!

Have you ever been called into a kid's room at night because there were scary monsters hiding in the closet or under the bed? What do you do to set the child's mind at ease? You turn on the light and look under the bed, right? So let's see if we can try to knock some of the fear off the edges of this "apocalyptic" text. We'll start by turning on the light, in other words we'll start by setting some context.

Context is everything here, it is important to point out that we are reading this text on the last Sunday of the liturgical year, at the end of fifty-two Sundays of hearing about the work of God throughout history, in Israel, in the time of Jesus, and in the early church. For a solid year, we've reflected on how we fit into that story and its relevance for our daily lives. That's what we do throughout the Christian year. It is not surprising then, that we should end the year with a testament to the New Creation, ending the Bible as it began, with God's hand at work making all things new and full of God's glory. Thus, we call this Sunday "Reign of Christ Sunday." You may have already picked this up liturgically this a loftier Sunday. The words you see in the bulletin today can even feel little borderline spooky in some places if you're sensitive to that, and I know some of us are.

The very notion of the “Reign of Christ” may trigger uncomfortable associations of triumphalist Christianity, complete with paintings of Jesus holding a sword and wearing armor and looking more like a Roman soldier or noble warrior than a Healer of Nations. It may remind us of times when "Christ the King" meant assuming free license to eliminate anyone who disagreed with us-unfortunately, for some people it still mean that. And you know, that’s enough to deal with on any given Sunday, but then there’s the Book of Revelation, which holds associations with fundamentalist preaching and warnings about the end times, a version of Christianity that frightened many people right out the church. But wait a minute... I am supposed to be putting on the light and making you feel at ease...Here is what I propose, rather than seeing today’s texts as an end point, let’s try thinking of them as a part of a continuum that moves from God’s covenant(what was), to Christ’s reign(what is), to the Spirit’s abiding presence(what ever shall be); a circle of hope if you will. More on circles in a moment...

But first let’s set the record straight about the Book of Revelation, here’s a bit of commentary we might find useful:

Tradition holds that the apostle John wrote the book of Revelation while in exile on the island of Patmos during the reign of the emperor Domitian (81–96 CE). The Roman emperors claimed to be “Lord” and “Father” of all people. In doing so, the Roman Empire expected people to yield to its authority with gratitude for all the good things it provided. Those who refused to address an emperor in this way faced persecution or death. Early Christians, persistently faithful to the confession of Christ alone as Lord, faced great risk in declaring so. This book was written to offer hope and encouragement to Christians enduring such trials.

In this book, the word “revelation” is a translation of the Greek word apokalypsis, and means, “an unveiling.” The type of writing in Revelation is known as apocalyptic writing. It offers bold visions of the new dwelling place of peace that God is preparing for God’s people. The writer intended this book to be difficult to understand, so that it would seem harmless to any government official who might read it. (Season’s of the Spirit Nov. 28, 2006)

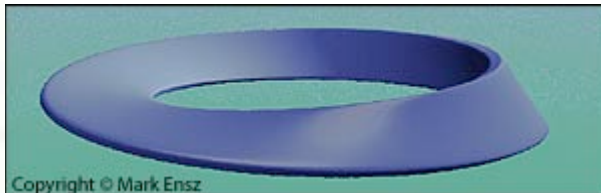
There you go, the book that has withstood more misinterpretation than any other book in the Bible, was actually intended as a letter of consolation, a letter of hope-the purpose of this text is to connect the end with the beginning.



Ants on a Möbius Strip by M.C. Escher

Have you have heard of a Möbius Strip?

Use the example of a strip of paper



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It was named after the astronomer and mathematician August Ferdinand Möbius (1790-1868). He came up with his 'strip' in September 1858. The same year, a German mathematician Johann Benedict Listing (1808-1882) devised the same object. In short a Möbius strip only has one side and one edge. The end is connected to the beginning it's a continuum.

Parker Palmer introduced the Mobius Strip as a metaphor for faith at a lecture I attended recently, he fleshed out that metaphor saying, “The authentic journey intentionally taken is never a means to an end, rather it always leads back to the beginning.”

In the Gospel according to John, Jesus is nearing the end of his life, but his words point to back to his beginning. He says he came for one reason, “to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Everyone who belongs to the truth...what does it mean **to belong to the truth?** I think it means this...**the Mobius Strip**. It means living the life we mean to live, the life God means for us to live- one that is connected from the inside out. **It belongs to the truth**. Paul Goble stopped by the house Friday to tell me that he and Mary Jane wouldn't be here this Sunday, they were going to go see their latest great grand baby. I said Paul, I'm sorry you won't be there on Sunday we'll be talking about the “Apocalypse.” You know, I was trying to get a rise out of him and he just smiled the way Paul does and said, “I'm not a bit worried about all that, I am who I mean to be.” The Mobius strip... the inside and the outside are in communion, complete harmony.

Who we are now shouldn't be so very different than who we expect to be when we breath our last breath. Where this apocalyptic voice can be helpful is when we don't feel like the inside matches up with the outside, these words are there to say the time is now! Don't put off becoming who you want to be, start today. You never know how long you might have to get things right.

It's the end of the church year, an opportunity to move into Advent with a clean slate and an open heart. I leave you with this to think about as we draw this liturgical year to an end—the thought comes to us from George Bernard Shaw,

This is the true joy of life, the being used up for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.

I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the community, and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live.

Life is no "brief candle" to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for a moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.

As it was in the beginning it now and ever shall be, world without end
Amen, and Amen.