Hi,

Yowza!! The fiftieth of these emails . . . enough said.

* **My Monday class next week will not meet**, as Patti and I will be away for the day.
* Please take a few minutes and complete [our survey of the congregation](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/56LPWQ8). It will help our church leaders to make better decisions in the weeks ahead.
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org/). All the postings are up-to-date.
* Keep sending in those movie and book recommendations.

I’ve seen a few articles online claiming that the pandemic is part of the seal-opening in Revelation, with the four horsemen now riding into view. How foolish. As if we haven’t always lived with these horsemen -- violence, war, economic distress, and death.

***Revelation 6:1-11 (NRSV)***

**Then I saw the Lamb open one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures call out, as with a voice of thunder, “Come!” I looked, and there was a white horse! Its rider had a bow; a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering and to conquer.**

**When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature call out, “Come!” And out came another horse, bright red; its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people would slaughter one another; and he was given a great sword.**

**When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature call out, “Come!” I looked, and there was a black horse! Its rider held a pair of scales in his hand, and I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, “A quart of wheat for a day’s pay, and three quarts of barley for a day’s pay, but do not damage the olive oil and the wine!”**

**When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature call out, “Come!” I looked and there was a pale green horse! Its rider’s name was Death, and Hades followed with him; they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, famine, and pestilence, and by the wild animals of the earth.**

**When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given; they cried out with a loud voice, “Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?” They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number would be complete both of their fellow servants and of their brothers and sisters, who were soon to be killed as they themselves had been killed.**

Four horsemen, seven seals, seven trumpets, each carrying forward the ever-increasing and repetitive terror. What do we make of this? What is the point of it all? Is it really a movie script of sorts, showing in detail horrors that lie ahead? Will we see a rider on a pale horse arcing across the skies? Will giant locusts come flooding out of a bottomless pit, torturing and killing people across the planet (9:7-11)?

While I think most of us would accept that God is not talking to us about giant bugs, we are still left wondering what these images are about. Today’s vision of the four horsemen is a great place to begin exploring the interpretation of Revelation’s most difficult and troubling passages.

*The seals are opened*

In the heavenly throne room, the Lamb steps forward as the one worthy to open the scroll that is held in the hand of the one on the throne (see Revelation 5). After all of creation joins in the worship of the Lamb and the one on the throne, the Lamb opens the first four of the seven seals, with each opened seal bringing forth a rider on a horse.

There is a pattern to these four horsemen. The first rider comes out on a white horse, carrying a bow, a weapon of war, and sets about conquering. It isn’t hard to imagine the threat posed by this first rider. The second rider is on a bright red horse and carries a mighty sword. This rider goes across the planet setting people against one another (as if we needed help with that one!). The third rider, on a black horse, seems a bit more obscure. This rider carries a set of scales that would be used in commerce. The prices quoted by the rider for the basics of life, like wheat, are astronomically high. This rider brings famine and economic hardship. The final rider is on a pale green horse and bears the name, Death.

Conquest, violence, famine, and death. They are dressed up in dramatic imagery but they are certainly not new to us. Furthermore, though John’s visions depict these as being inflicted by the heavens, we know that these are all self-inflicted, when we stop and think of humanity as one. It is we who make war on one another. It is we who take the peace away and stand by while others starve. Going back to the Garden of Eden, even death is the result of humanity’s choice. The riders bring nothing that we haven’t already brought on ourselves. Still, there is the clear sense in this vision that God is a threat.

So what’s the point? Is there something new here? Craig Koester suggests that this vision sets the stage for what follows, in that the riders are a call to repentance and faith. *Repentance*: Will we turn 180° and walk toward God not away from him? *Faith*: Will we trust God in all things and above all else?

*In God We (Ought to)Trust!*

Look again at each of the four riders. Can we build armies powerful enough to keep away all foreign conquerors? September 11 shattered that illusion for any who still held it. Can we build a large enough police force to stop all violence and return the peace? The proliferation of both prisons and crime answers that one for us. Can we have bank accounts large enough to shield us from any economic hardship? Even our resilient economy would have a hard time withstanding nuclear attacks on several cities. How about death? Do any of us know a doctor who can make us immortal. My doctor has gotten me this far in life, but he is only going to take me so far.

Stark images, such as today’s, are meant to be that proverbial wake-up call, the 2x4 upside the head. It’s a bit like an “intervention,” where loved ones gather to confront someone with the truth, to shock them into seeing that their life is a wreck and they need help.

As John’s visions continue through the remaining seals and then the trumpets, the 2x4 becomes a railroad tie. There is nowhere to hide from God (6:15-17) and no one else to trust. As the reader, you’ll find yourself screaming at the page, “What’s it going to take?! Is there no one who repents, no one who trusts God?”

Yet, in chapter 7, John hears and sees a faithful remnant. In chapter 11, we meet two faithful witnesses. Finally, we learn of some who look past their terror and give glory to God (11:13).

*Movie recommendation*

I’ve come to learn that younger generations haven’t necessarily discovered the iconic films of 30-40 years ago, such as *ET: The Extra-Terrestrial*. Such a great film and #24 on the AFI top 100.

*Book recommendation*

Today, I offer another introduction to the book of Revelation: *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation* by the eminent biblical scholar, Bruce Metzger. It is a brief volume, meant for laypeople. It has been used by several small groups at St. Andrew.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott