Hi,

Today’s updates. Patti and I hope you have a wonderful 4th of July!

* As explained in yesterday’s email, all of my on-line classes will now be on a [new Facebook page I’ve set up, “Scott Engle-St. Andrew UMC.”](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour) Be sure to go to this link for the 11am Sunday class.
* My Sunday class will be the last week of the series, *The New Testament in Seven Sentences*. As usual, it will be on [my new Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour).
* My 3pm Monday class on Matthew and my noon Tuesday class on Genesis will meet next week, both on [my new Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour).
* 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://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.
* I am devoting only five daily emails to Revelation. But last year, I taught a twenty-week class on Revelation and all the sessions are [on my podcast site](https://scottengle.podbean.com/). The first was on Aug 20 2019 and the last on Jan 27 2020. You can listen to the podcast episodes via your browser ([here](https://scottengle.podbean.com/)) and through the Apple Podcast app and the Podbean player (iOS and Android).
* The Weekly Bible Study is attached.

And so we come to the glorious visions of a world put right and humanity restored to a right relationship with God. I hope you can take great comfort in these words.

***Revelation 21:1-6, 22:1-7 (NRSV)***

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

**“See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; 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.”**

**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.” 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.**

**Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; 4they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.**

**And he said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true, for the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.”**

**“See, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”**

Much lies between yesterday’s reading from Revelation and today’s, i.e., from the invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb and his bride, to the “new heaven and new earth” of chapter 21. Jesus rides out on a white horse to lead God’s army in the defeat of Satan’s minions and the imprisonment of Satan himself, ushering in a time of Jesus’ reign. After Satan’s parole(?), he resumes his opposition to God and must be defeated a second time. Next comes the scene of the great judgment and the reading from the book of life. Finally, we arrive at the scenes to which all of Scripture has been leading us: the arrival of the new heaven and the new earth, the tree of life . . . and the Alpha and Omega.

*Looking back so we can look ahead*

It’s easy to get lost in the expanse of the Bible. 66 books. 1,189 chapters. 31,102 verses. Written, compiled, and edited over many centuries. Millennia ago. Yet, there is an over-arching narrative to this vast library. It is the story of God putting right what went wrong almost from the beginning. God created the cosmos, pronounced it good, and made humans in his image. He gave them a beautiful place to live and work. Yet, tragically, they tossed it all away for the chance to be like gods themselves. So God set about to put things right. God chose a people, Abraham and his descendants, through whom this restoration would proceed. In the end, God, in the person of Jesus Christ, would have to do for Israel and all humanity what they were and we still are unable to do for ourselves – simply to love God and to love neighbor.

The renewal of creation and the restoration of loving relationship is what it has always been about. They are the final fulfillment of promises God made through his many prophets. Hence, the closing visions of Revelation are like a stained glass window in which each fragment of glass is borrowed from earlier in the story that began with Genesis. The “new heaven and new earth” is from Isaiah 65 and 66. The loud voices from the throne sing from Ezekiel, as well as Isaiah 35 and 65. The water of life evokes for us the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well to whom he promises “a spring of water that gushes up to eternal life” (John 4). There is the tree of life, which we have not seen since Genesis 3 when the humans were exiled from the Garden of Eden, denying them access to this tree that gives eternal life. Whereas Moses couldn’t see God’s face and live (Exodus 33:20), we are told that God’s servants will see God’s face (Rev. 22:4).

*All will be well*

It is so easy to be caught up in the troubles and terrors of our lives and our world. Too often, we are overwhelmed by our anxieties and fears. Yet, these apocalyptic visions of a day with no death or tears or pain are God’s promises that all will be well. John Ortberg wrote of our hunger for joy, rightful hunger because joy lies at the core of the cosmos. The closing visions of Revelation are one big fountain of joy. We may not always know that all will be well, but God knows it. Ortberg quotes a Christian who lived long ago, Julian of Norwich:

“All will be well, and all will be well, and all manner of things will be well.”

The “End” is not an event but a “ Who.” There is no need for a temple in the new Jerusalem of Revelation 21 because the temple is the Lord God and the Lamb (v. 22). There is no need for a sun or the light of a lamp because the Lord God will be our light (22:5). It is the Lamb who is the “Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (22:12). *Maranatha . . . Come, Lord Jesus, Come (Revelation 22:20)*

*A bit more on living Revelation*

In his *New Interpreter’s Bible* commentary on Revelation, Christopher Rowland reflects on Revelation’s claims to authority and the challenge of living with John’s apocalyptic visions:

“We are left in no doubt about the importance John attached to his book [see the blessings of 1:3 and the warnings of 22:18-19]. It is ironic that the book in the New Testament with the most exalted claim to authority is the one that is least read and most widely despised. Even if we cannot understand its message in its entirety and are uncomfortable with the import of what we can understand, we must not ignore it. It stands not only at the end of the New Testament, but at the end of the Christian Bible. Thus it may offer us a key to understanding the whole story, because it points to the fulfillment of God's purposes, of which all else gives only a partial and fragmentary example. Its message is about God and about human history. Its scope is panoramic, and its focus on Jesus as the key to understanding the fulfillment of God's justice is central. Revelation may enable us to look back over the biblical story and make sense of the whole as well as pointedly reminding us of the demands made on us by a God who regards every action as significant. We may begin to glimpse what the Spirit says to the churches and learn to respond accordingly: ‘Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates’ (22:14 NRSV; cf. 7:14).”

“Revelation is intended to be heard and read. Keeping the words is not about defensiveness or preservation, nor is it simply a matter of intellectual understanding confined to academy or church. Keeping the words means practicing their message in life. It is a matter of being so utterly informed and pervaded by the words that one can perceive that ‘the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.’ John had to devour the book, and there is a sense in which the reader and the hearer must do that with Revelation—digest it so that one also can ‘prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings.’ Thus the effect of reading the text is to condition an outlook on life whereby image and metaphor jar us awake and transform our actions as well as our attitudes. The temptation is to ask what this book is about and to seek references in history—past, present, or future. But first and foremost, Revelation is meant to be heard and to be read, so that the reader/listener is changed; that change means repentance and rebirth (cf. Matt 19:28).”

‘til Monday, grace and peace,

Scott