

"The Intention of God"
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Revelation 21:1-5

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In their natural habitat, we humans have turned "looking back" into an art form! We are incredibly good at it...amazingly proficient. "Looking back" may be one of the things we humans do best. It is so tempting for us to get into that past "safe place" and rest there. After all, it is usually very familiar territory; and who does not enjoy the familiar? Plus, there are not many risks in "looking back." However, if this is the direction many of us (and often the world) faces much of the time, one could suggest there *is risk* in doing so.

A prime example of how easy it is to "look back" is the story of the Exodus. After a while, the people seemed to have forgotten the astounding acts of God on their behalf, leading to their freedom, and began to bitterly complain to Moses about their future; so much so that they began "looking back," saying it would have been better to have remained in Egypt under the control of those who enslaved them. At least *that* was "familiar territory" to them!

Sometimes we look back out of fear; or perhaps with sentimentality; or even nostalgia. Or maybe we look back with some bit of hope to see something that will help the future. I fear, however, that, if we think about it, we "look back" because it is easier, and safer, and less threatening than looking the other way—which would be *forward*.

I recently read an article on the topic of Church, new technology, and cultural shifts. In it the writer offers aggressive observations. Among them is this one...

"Many of us have 8-track ministries in a DVD world. We are married to an [outdated] methodology."

The writer also talks about Moses and Joshua at the time just before the entry into the Promised Land. The writer suggests we need a "remix version" of Jesus' message; that

"Moses is dead, but Joshua is alive.
We cannot reach a 'Joshua generation'
with a 'Moses methodology.'"

In other words, at one point Moses was clearly the past and Joshua clearly the future. Then he writes,

"Joshua could remix because Moses
gave him the tools to remix. [We, today, need]
to be willing to do what Moses did.
[Moses] laid hands on Joshua
and [then] got out of the way."

(Rev. Otis Moss III, pastor, Trinity United Church of Christ, Chicago, IL. In an April 23, 2010 article in the United Methodist Reporter)

In other words, it is *not* God's intention to "look back," but to "look forward." A perfect example of this is the words in today's Scripture passage, "And the One seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.' And He said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true'" (*Rev. 21:5*). When the Apostle John wrote of a "new heaven and a new earth" he did not mean to start a perpetual lottery for the date of the end. He was trying to report God's intention for all of Creation. (*Hope for the Future—A Study of Revelation*, Wm. Carter, p. 66.)

Notice that God does not say, "...I am making all NEW things..." There are scholars who suggest God does *not* intend to destroy everything so nothing is no longer recognizable. God does *not* intend to start all over, so-to-speak. In the Greek, there are two words for our word "new." One of those words has the sense of "absolutely, totally new." This is not the word used here. The Greek word used *here* for "new" has the sense of "renewed"—a "new quality that exceeds the old," a new *kind* of people, and things, and world...all, and each, restored to glory.

Again, it is not making all NEW things, but "**making all things new.**"

Today's passage from the Book of Revelation offers an abundance of amazing things.

For example, let's take the first phrase: "And the One seated on the throne said..." Here, God speaks, as clearly heard by the writer. According to scholars this is the only place in the Book of Revelation where God speaks. And then we have the second phrase: "See, I am making all things new." The phrase "am making" is the "present continuous" tense...meaning not static, in process, on-going, happening now. And the phrase "all things new" does not mean things are being restored by God to some sort of previous condition. They are being "redeemed" to better.

So what might that look like? None of us knows. We can only posit and conjecture. However, the prophet Isaiah gives a descriptive of how this will be when God fulfills God's intent:

"The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them...
They will not hurt or destroy
on all My holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the
knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea." (*Isaiah 11:6f*)

God is not just somehow fixed in the past, but leads all things into the future. God's plan...God's purpose...God's *intention* is to always be unfolding and moving into the future!

Out with the old...

Out with sin and death...

Out with fighting and fears...

Out with distrust and enslavement

Out with how things were...

These belong to the old order which, in these moments even right now are "being made new." Our responsibility is to remain faithful, with hearts and minds "to see"! God is doing this, and it is happening now. As the scripture says, "**Behold, and see...I am making all things new.**" And verse seven tells us again of God's intention: "[Those] who overcome will inherit..." (*Rev. 21:7, adpt*).

THIS is the hope we have in the Risen Christ! THIS is why I believe God's intention is for us to always *look forward*.