

Dec 8/24 – (Leader’s Guide)

Revelation 4:1-6a; 5:1-10; 20:11-15 “Judgment is Good News!”

1. What do you sense people in both the world and church understand by the judgment of God?

In this question I’m trying to develop a “baseline” for what kinds of convictions around God’s judgement are present in your group and in the circles they travel. This will help you as a leader navigate what may be a difficult discussion in places. Don’t spend too much time here, ask for brief responses, hear from everyone, and then press into the content itself.

Read Luke 3:1-18 This passage is always read on the second Sunday of Advent to help us reflect on the Christian conviction (that we affirm each week in the creed), that Jesus “is coming again to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.”

2. What do we learn about Jesus’ coming in judgement? How do we make sense of Luke’s affirmation that this is good news?
 - *The preparation for it involves repentance and bearing fruit in keeping with repentance – reflected in the act of baptism*
 - *Messiah’s judgement will be with the Holy Spirit and fire – perfectly separating out what is from God and what is a result of sin and death.*
 - *Messiah’s judgement will make a final end to sin and death.*

How is this good news? There will be a final end to sin and death, and all that will remain will be that which is of God – his reign of peace and justice.

Read Revelation 4:1-6a; 5:1-10; 20:11-15 Jesus’ return in judgement finds its culmination in the vision of chapter 20, but this is the last of 7 visions reflecting on this throne. Each vision clarifies the nature of judgement, none more than the first.

3. (Revelation 4:1-6a) What do the various images tell us about the nature and goal of God’s judgement?

Throne – there is someone in charge of the universe – despite the state of your life - our world – it is not guided by blind fate or chaos – but by the one who sits upon the throne

Jasper and Carnelian – John is so overwhelmed by the beauty of what he beholds that he reaches for images related to the most beautiful things his eyes have ever beheld

A rainbow encircles the throne – harkening back to Genesis 9 where after Noah’s flood a rainbow becomes a symbol of God’s faithfulness and mercy, capturing the promise that after judgement comes new beginning.

24 elders – likely represent the fullness of God’s people – represented by the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles. Our representatives are already present around the throne participating in heavenly worship. They are clothed in white – purified by his blood to be holy (set apart for a purpose) – crowned to reign with him upon the earth. This may come into play later in your discussion.

Thunder and Lightening. If there is any doubt who is on the throne this image clinches it, for thunder and lightening were often a part of the old testament theophanies – this is God Almighty.

The Lord almighty exists as trinity. God the creator, the son as the lamb is before (in the midst of) the throne (see chapter 5), and now also before – in the midst of – are the 7 spirits or the fullness of the spirit

Before the throne is a sea of glass – the sea was believed to be the place where evil and chaos resided – through the book of revelation everything that stands against God’s good creation comes from the sea. Before the Lord’s throne chaos is stilled, subdued, brought to order.

In summary the Lord’s glory is reflected by his work making everything new. His judgement is guided by his faithful promises and his mercy. The focus of his judgement is to redeem a faithful people who would reign with him over a renewed cosmos, for after judgement comes a new beginning, a new creation.

4. (Revelation 5:1-10) The scroll is God’s plan to rectify all that has gone wrong with his good creation, a plan that of necessity involves judging wrong, removing evil, destroying the tyrannical forces that have humanity in their grasp. Why do you think it is that John weeps that no one is found worthy to open it? Do you join him in sorrow? Why or why not?

For 80 years John has beheld the tyrannical power of Rome – bent on conquest – ravaging it’s territories to build the glory of Rome – leaving them destitute - crushing all who oppose with a reign of fear and terror – it’s wrath has turned on followers of Jesus – he’s had friends tortured – killed – silenced – himself rotting away – no no no – John cries - there must be change – there must be new creation – he weeps...

We may well weep with him – no Lord – no - end war – heal illness – remove tyrannical powers – bring justice – come with new creation – for that is the heartbeat of judgement – the bringing of new creation

5. Why is it that Jesus is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?

The following is an unedited section of the sermon that will help you reflect on this question:

He alone is worthy – well of course he is – we might - he's God incarnate – if anyone's worthy - its him – but no – that's not the rationale given in the response of praise

They sing – not - you are worthy because your God – they sing – you are worthy for you ransomed a people for God – made them a kingdom of priests

This is the language of new exodus - as God rescued Israel from slavery to the ruler and God's of Egypt – he ransomed a people to worship – to live in step with his way – that they would reflect his goodness and justice bringing life to all – now Jesus by his death and resurrection has rescued a people from slavery to sin and false gods – ransoming a multiethnic people to worship - that living in step with his way – we would reflect his goodness and justice bringing life to all.

You might hear in that - the language of our last series – indeed as Karen crafted this series – she saw it as the continuation of the last – and here's how it fits - In that series we said – this was God's plan for creation – we – humanity created in God's image to steward creation - oriented toward God in worship we would as a mirror reflect his nature and character out into the world bringing life to all - but the grievous story of humanity is that we turned away to false God's - began to worship such things as wealth – power – beauty – sex – comfort – and mirroring such realities out into the world brought not life but death – but God's plan for creation did not change – he still desired for faithful humanity to steward creation for the flourishing of all – so the biblical story tells us that he chooses a person Abraham – through him a family – through them - a nation - Israel – to fulfill that purpose – but at each turn failure – but then one of that family line – Jesus – the only faithful human who reflected God's nature and character to bring life to all – and in him – through his death and resurrection – all of humanity may come to reflect his nature and character and bring life to all – a kingdom of priests – now notice the tenses in the song – we are both made to be and will be a kingdom of priests – that vocation is both present and future – we live that out now – and will continue to live that out in new creation - a theme we will continue to explore in the series.

That is why he alone is worthy to open the scroll – he is the only faithful human – the one to set creation back on it's proper course

6. (Revelation 20:11-15) On what basis is humanity judged? What is our hope on that day?

Our deeds. Books are open containing our deeds. Containing an answer to the question have we reflected the nature and character of God bringing life to the world around us?

Some may protest that we can't be judged on deeds for we are saved by faith. The consistent teaching of scripture, consistent teaching of Jesus is that we are indeed judged on our deeds but that is not incompatible with our faith for as preacher Darrell Johnson puts it – in the final accounting it will be according to our deeds, for our deed are the most reliable indicators of where our faith lies

Our hope is in the lamb's book of life. Rulers in the ancient world would keep records of their citizens. When one was born their name was recorded as a citizen, only death would remove the name.

The lamb's book of life records the names of all who come to new birth in Jesus – all who have been made a citizen of his kingdom by adoption and grace. Since it is his life in us it is a life that can never be extinguished.

7. “He has made us a kingdom of priests”. We are invited even now through the open door into God's reality to take our place in the heavenly worship that is happening all around us. Heavenly worship has a dynamic where, as worship is brought to the one upon throne new creation flows. How does this dynamic of heavenly worship help us to understand how we live is a Kingdom of priests here and now?

Please find below my concluding paragraphs of the sermon that will hopefully help you navigate this question with your group. I include all of it as this is I think for many a new concept:

A door is open in heaven – a door into God's reality - not a door way way up there – a door on the island of patmos – a door in the city of Toronto – right here – close beside us – God's reality intersecting with our own reality – we're invited in – as a kingdom of priests invited into a worship service that's already going on – all around us – our prayers – as we see from John's vision are already a part of it..

The orthodox tradition – which I know some of you come from understands this - their worship spaces adorned to invite the worshipper to take their place in this heavenly worship – what is the nature of that worship? – we see it the throne room visions of revelation – creations praise is directed toward the one on the throne – and judgement – new creation flows from it – worship and new creation go hand and hand - like breathing – exhaling worship – inhaling new creation – exhaling worship – inhaling new creation - a worship that isn't just about singing songs and reciting prayers – worship that takes up every fiber of our being – our relationships directed in worship toward the way of Jesus – our work directed in worship toward the way of Jesus – our leisure directed in worship toward the way of Jesus – our use of money directed in worship toward the way of Jesus – and in that worship – judgement comes – in that worship new creation comes - darkness pushed back with the light of Jesus – hate pushed back by his love – conflict pushed back by his peace - unforgiveness pushed back by his reconciliation

Worship and judgement – worship and new creation go hand in hand –

I have been a U2 fan for much of my life – a band whose faith in Jesus is expressed so beautifully in their music – and as I reflected on what it means to be invited even now into this heavenly worship – I was brought to remember the close of their vertigo tour

Their penultimate song was entitled Yahweh – a song that invites us to turn all of our faculties to God's service as we await the dawn – the dawn of a new creation – U2 sing - Yahweh take these hands – teach them what to carry – Yahweh take this mouth – so quick to criticize – give it a kiss

– touch it with your love – that I might speak your love – Yahweh take this heart – make it break for the things that break your heart – as I await the dawn – the dawn of a new creation.

The concert ended as the lights were brought down – 10s of thousands signing the refrain of their last song – psalm 40 put to music – the refrain carries a cry of lament – and a cry of hope – the cry of lament – how long will we sing this song – which I take to mean how long will sin and death mar your good creation – how long will injustice reign – and then the refrain turns to a cry of hope – but I will sing – sing a new song – a song that God gives us to sing – a song that even now is being sung around that heavenly throne – a song of new creation – a song of all things being made new.

It may not have been U2s intent – but I know that they actively order their concerts as Christian liturgy – and so it seemed to me their concert closing perfectly captured what it is to be a kingdom of priests – we lament – we grieve what is – as we yearn for the dawn – yearn for new creation – and in that gap between what is and what will be - we turn every aspect of our lives over to Jesus in worship – Jesus take these hands, take these feet, take this mouth, take this heart - that in and through that worship – judgement may come – new creation may come.

Judgement is good news – the best possible news – for by it and through it new creation comes...