
Do We Want to Be Made Well?

Revelation 21:1-6

21 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. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ 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;

⁴ 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.”

⁵ 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.” ⁶ 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.

John 5:1-9

5 After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

² Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. ³ In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. ⁵ One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be made well?” ⁷ The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.” ⁸ Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” ⁹ At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

Now that day was a sabbath.

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Still Speaking God – who loves us just the way we are... and loves us too much to let us stay that way!

Let me begin by expressing my gratitude to the Rev. Dr. Alison Boden for her 15 years as Princeton’s Dean of Religious Life and for providing spiritual formation to so many students. Like many of you, what brings me back this weekend is Reunions – in my case, my class’s 50th – and this morning I am honored to share in the ministry of God’s word with Dean Boden.

Now let us be in a spirit of prayer:

May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable unto you O Lord; our strength, and our Redeemer. Amen

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Just as the academic calendar follows a familiar annual cycle, so too the church calendar. Today's worship falls between Easter and Pentecost. For seven Sundays every year, we identify with the Disciples as they grieve the loss of their leader. We ponder their disorientation. We come to terms with how lost they seem to be. We realize that for the Disciples, the seven weeks between the first Easter and the day of Pentecost is a time of reckoning. After Jesus' crucifixion:

- Would they be able to set-aside the temptation to return to business as usual?
- Could they step out of their role as followers so that they could become leaders of the greatest mass movement the world had ever seen?
- Could they muster the courage and resolve required to transform the world?

These are **our** questions too... because our generation is now contending with **another time of reckoning** brought about by the convergence of several crises: a worldwide pandemic; an undermining of our democracy; and a brutal war. While each of us would provide a distinct account of the impact of these crises on our life, a common thread for all of us would be our experience of grief and loss.

Now: Something else is going on in the lives of the Disciples in the weeks after Jesus' crucifixion...

- something that defies explanation...
- something that awakens joy amidst the grieving...
- something that emboldens their resolve:

Jesus appears to them – not once, but several times. It was this experience of genuine, prolonged grief combined with multiple appearances of Jesus that prepared the disciples for the day of Pentecost, when they would receive the power of the Holy Spirit. That power would not only transform their lives, but working through them, the power of the Holy Spirit would transform the world.

But, of course, the world is not transformed overnight. In fact, that transformation continues to this day. And over the centuries, particularly in times when the health, the rights or the safety of people is being threatened, people long to hear God's message found in today's reading from the book of Revelation:

See – I am making all things new!

But here's the catch: **the way God makes all things new... is through us!**

You and I are God's hands and feet. And before we can be of service to God's desire to make all things new, we must answer the question that Jesus puts to the man who, for 38 years, has been lying by the pool near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem:

Do you want to be made well?

Jesus' question is a personal question to a man in a prolonged personal crisis. But for us – for our generation – it is a much, much larger question....

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- As cases of the new variant of the Coronavirus continue to rise, do we want to be made well?
- As unapologetic authoritarian candidates and autocratic governmental leaders seek to expand their power and influence... do we want to be made well?
- As a brutal, senseless war continues **with no end in sight**... do we want to be made well?

Yes... Like the Disciples, we too are living in a time of reckoning. And as we contend with these three crises, we must **also address the greatest moral crisis humanity has ever faced: the climate emergency.**

Climate change is a “moral crisis” because every justice issue people of faith care about – hunger, poverty, homelessness, racism, immigration, disease, lack of access to clean water and education – these justice issues are intersectional -- these concerns are not separate and distinct from one another – and climate change is making every one of them worse.

Another reason climate change is a “moral crisis” is that over the last 200 years, the actions of about seven generations of humans have put God’s glorious gift of life-giving creation in jeopardy. To put it another way: we are no longer living on the same planet we used to call “home.” Here are three examples of what I mean.

- **For the past two summers**, the arctic circle has seen daytime highs over 50 degrees above normal – hitting an all-time high of 118°F.ⁱ And **two months ago** [3192022], places in Antarctica were 70°F above normal.ⁱⁱ
- Scientists **now** (2021) reportⁱⁱⁱ that if global warming exceeds 1.5°C (2.7°F), the world’s tropics could become uninhabitable. Imagine 2.5 **billion** refugees.
- And finally, the past 10 years have been the hottest decade since records have been kept^{iv} -- and the past decade will be **the coolest** decade your children or your grandchildren will ever experience.

Hearing these facts triggers grief – grief for the world we have loved... the world we have let go. But I believe that grief prepares our heart and mind for authentic hope. That was certainly the experience of the disciples in the weeks after Jesus was crucified. Their grieving prepared their hearts for hope – and thus allowed them to receive the power of the Holy Spirit and to live-into a new story.

If we want to be made well, we must become people of hope. And as we have learned from epidemiologists, from the House Select Committee, from Volodymyr Zelenskyy and from climate scientists and activists, **“Hope starts with honesty.”**

And since the world is starving for both hope **and** honesty, God is calling us – as people of faith – to become people of hope. **Real** hope.

- Hope that acknowledges the full challenge we are facing.

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- Hope that propels us to help lead the most profound transition in human history, as we seek a more vital, life-giving, justice-embracing future.
- Hope that leaves no one behind;
- Hope that realizes that the restoration of God’s creation serves as the foundation for our future;
- Hope that recognizes that “**we’re all in this together!**” –
- And that our personal prospects are bound up with what happens to everyone else.

Fifty plus years ago, when I was an undergraduate here, as countless students, faculty and administrators addressed numerous crises, our response was often a resounding, “**YES! We want to be made well!**”

- In 1969, Princeton admitted the first class with both men and women.^v
- In 1971, the Carl A. Fields Center for Equality and Cultural Understanding opened.^{vi} Back then it was called the Third World Center.
- In 1970, as part of the first Earth Day, we held a four day long “Environmental Teach-In”^{vii}

I could go on and on with examples like these.

What would it look like for you and me – for our generation – to respond to our current crises with a resounding, “YES! We want to be made well!”?

When it comes to the climate crisis, our beloved University has been seeking solutions for over half a century.^{viii} Scores of faculty from dozens of departments along with their students contribute to interdisciplinary research and innovation. Their discoveries are among the cornerstones of a viable future.

Another example of our university exclaiming, “YES! We want to be made well!” is the investment of hundreds of millions of dollars in two new state-of-the-art geo-exchange systems that will heat and cool the entire campus while replacing 100 year old FF technology.^{ix} Hopefully, Princeton’s leadership will inspire university and corporate campuses **throughout the world** to follow Princeton’s example.

Hundreds of alumni, students, faculty, staff and parents have been focused on two additional opportunities by which Princeton could add to its climate commitment. One opportunity is to divest Princeton’s endowment of its fossil fuel holdings.^x This was first proposed back in 2013... which is when my denomination, the United Church of Christ, became the first religious body and first national body to vote to divest. In **the nine years since then**, portfolios worth over 40 trillion dollars have divested their FF holdings.^{xi} Thus far, over 3,000 Princeton alumni, students, faculty, staff and parents have signed an Open Letter to President Eisgruber urging Princeton to divest.

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Another opportunity for Princeton to exclaim, “YES! We want to be made well!” would be to stop accepting funding from fossil fuel companies to conduct climate research.^{xii}

Such actions would go a long way towards advancing Princeton’s unofficial motto, which was revised in 2016 to read, “**Princeton in the nation’s service and the service of humanity.**”

You and I have been given the gift of life at the most critical moment in the 2 million years humans have walked on earth. Living as we are on the hinge of history, it falls to us – to our generation – to determine the fate of the earth and all its inhabitants.

If that sounds a bit overwhelming – you’re right!

But by opening ourselves to receive the power of the Holy Spirit, we can respond to God’s call to become **bearers of new possibility as we participate in God’s initiative to make all things new.**

Because the climate crisis places an inescapable moral claim – not only upon each one of us, but upon our generation, it’s time for us to re-read scripture and embrace the theme that is everywhere apparent: God calls **communities**, not just individuals! If we collapse the notion of vocation into the narrow confines of a single life, or a single life-time, we’re ignoring a major thrust of scripture.

The human community now has a vocation.

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God is calling our generation to live into a new story—a fossil fuel free story. A story in which we join millions of others as we realign our time, our energy, our gifts, our attention, and our assets to respond to the call now heard around the world.

- That call can be heard in the streets of countless cities every Friday when hundreds of thousands of young people are insisting that we end the era of fossil fuel.
- That call can be heard in the board rooms of Exxon and the other fossil fuel companies as more and more of their stockholders purge their portfolios of fossil fuel holdings.
- That call can be heard in the courtrooms where fossil fuel companies, pipeline developers and other corporate profiteers are being sued by cities, states, and children for violating their legal rights.
- That call can be heard in the halls of Congress as elected leaders must choose between the vast majority of Americans who are demanding climate action now and the fossil fuel corporate lobbyists whose influence must be set aside.

And what will fuel this effort? **Gratitude and hope.** Gratitude for having been given the opportunity to be part of what is the most consequential generation of human beings that has ever lived. You and I and everyone else alive today have been given the opportunity to abandon a destructive story of rugged individualism, exploitation, anthropocentrism, racist inequity, colonialist extraction, and environmental degradation. And in its place, to create a new

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understanding of interdependence, resilience, wonder, moral imagination, moderation, vision, and gratitude.

As for hope, I'll take my cue from Greta Thunberg. She's the one who said, "**Hope starts with honesty.**" As more and more congregations and people of faith engage the realities of the climate crisis, their impact will become more and more significant. And what will they discover?

- First, that action is an antidote to anxiety.
- And second, that action is a gateway to hope.

Let us embrace this active hope so that our generation can bend the moral arc of the universe toward justice and interdependence, even as we bend the ecological arc of the earth toward sustainability, renewal, and restoration.

Let the people say AMEN.

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ⁱ [Ground Temperatures Hit 118 Degrees in the Arctic Circle \(gizmodo.com\)](#) Also see Jeff Goodell, "Will We Miss Our Last Chance to Save the World From Climate Change?" *Rolling Stone*, December 22, 2016. On a larger scale, the Earth's temperature is already well into the range that existed during the Eemian period, 120,000 years ago when sea level was 20 to 30 feet higher than it is now. <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/features/will-we-miss-our-last-chance-to-survive-climate-change-w456917>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2022/03/18/antarctica-heat-wave-climate-change>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.nature.com/articles/41561-021-00695-3?utm_campaign=Hot%20News&utm_medium=email&_hsmt=114919869&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-9cjq3XpmRwtvweEXPM6SUwPRSIVf_W02QUVgt0CLgX23UzcebHTL3Nd8Wm_oC-4hP9YRHAr4XuwnYsgCpH4-eniufkzA&utm_content=114919869&utm_source=hs_email ; see also 50-50 chance that we reach 1.5°C (2.7°F) by

2027 (if only temporarily) ([AP](#), [The Guardian](#), [Axios](#), [BBC](#), [Reuters](#), [FT](#), [Forbes](#))

^{iv} [2021 Was Earth's Fifth-Hottest Year, Scientists Say - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#)

^v <https://alumni.princeton.edu/our-community/princeton-womenhistory#:~:text=The%20big%20decision%20came%20in,Yale%20had%20a%20similar%20vote.>

^{vi} <http://fieldscenter.princeton.edu/history>

^{vii} [Daily Princetonian 16 April 1970 — Princeton Periodicals](#)

^{viii} <https://environmenthalfcentury.princeton.edu>

^{ix} Princeton Alumni Weekly, April 2022; p. 8.

^x <https://www.dailyprincetonian.com/article/202103/divest-princeton-history> and <https://www.divestprinceton.com>

^{xi} [Global Fossil Fuel Commitments Database \(divestmentdatabase.org\)](#)

^{xii} [Universities must reject fossil fuel cash for climate research, say academics | Climate science | The Guardian](#)