

“Heavenly Tissues Needed.....
If We’re to Re-Dedicate and Celebrate!”
September 9, 2018 Rerun of...
September 11, 2005 A Weaving of...
May 10, 1998 Prompting...the formational
prompting of Tippe’s healing, with “Re-birthing
a Church: The Re-birth of Spirit” article from
Hungry Hearts.

Before the reading:

The book of Revelation is one of the hardest books to wrap your mind around. It is full of symbols and imagery. It seems mysterious and somewhat foreboding and yet hopeful. It was put into its final form during the rule of Emperor Domitian (AD 81-96) after the fall of Jerusalem. During Domitian's rule he demanded that his subjects address him as "Lord and God" and worship his image. For refusing to do so, many Christians were put to death and others, like John writer of this book, were exiled, and all were threatened. The use of mysterious figures and metaphors in this writing was to prevent the imperial police from recognizing that this book is a trumpet call to the persecuted, assuring them that despite the worst that the Roman Empire could do, God reigns supreme, and Christ, who died and is alive forevermore, has the power to overcome all evil. And therefore John closes his book with the prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

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Come, Lord Jesus -- Come.

This past Sunday afternoon I went as your presence, as the face and hands of Christ in each one of you, to visit some of the shut-ins of this congregation. I went and Jesus came. And together we (all!) stood on holy ground for it was profoundly clear to me that God dwelled with those I visited; was there before me. For many of them, first things had indeed passed away. Their world was no more. And some, I believe, could indeed begin to glimpse the "new Jerusalem" coming down even in their dementia; others, though more mentally clear, less able to perceive. And for many of the

family members, there were tears. And there was a longing for the gift of the waters from the spring of life to create something new for they thirsted for relief. Combining with my Sunday afternoon experience, I can hear the words of today's passage in Revelation as the promise of a new creation of life eternal.

But the words themselves reveal much more. It is a story of eschatology (the end of time), but the end is not in the future. It is "coming down" right now, first things have passed away (past tense). So, what does it mean for us?

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**Once a dance hall, Tippecanoe has been a church for nearly 90 years. Tippe is again being renewed, re-birthing, providing as much joy to those who dance their lives here now....as happened “once upon a time” long ago. This is a ministry place, a place of well-being, a place to grow into your own spiritual and emotional well-being through participation (and practice!) in worship, education, mission, and fellowship. Tippecanoe (What a metaphor for a life’s faith journey!) is indeed a place of Living Water.**

The vision of the new draws its inspiration from the old. The new heaven and earth is still "heaven and earth", and its gleaming capital is still a city like Jerusalem. Did John just lack imagination, or did he perceive that the new grows out of the old? The writer challenges our old notion that God created heaven and earth in 7 days, called it good, and then was done. This passage puts forward an understanding that God is still acting, creating, and that creation is still unfolding. Our God is in process and so is creation. And, the new creation grows out of the present one.

So, what does this new creation hinge itself upon? What triggers it? As I look to the heart of today's passage, I wonder if the coming of the new creation could have something to do with the tears that we cry -- tears that tell of our realities. Could it have something to do with God's wiping away our tears -- if we will cry them?

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**It is about losing blame and shame and opening to the depth possibility in the moment...often in what seems the most broken of moments. Do we...will we...let God in at all? Can we bask in the unknown and trust God will use all things for good....our good?**

**So, we began our journey together some 7 years ago embracing the wholeness and fragileness and creativity of community. We name things for what they are without judgment. We give each other permission to feel the way we do and stay....still stay....along side each other. We encourage each other not to be nice but be intentional....to come on the bad hair days, be grumpy if you are, don't pretend you didn't just have a huge argument in the car coming to church, wear your wrinkled shirt or Packer sweatshirt...but come. Because if we are only here in our "best" moments, how will we ever learn how to help each other with the "worst" moments. Being "really real" can be intense, but not as tense (or energy draining) as pretending can be. Pretending....nothing real happens and God is cut off and shut out.**

**We began to learn how to listen to each other and how to encourage each other to talk directly to the one who needs to hear us. We expect all of us to think, to be our own theologian...children and youth included....and we consciously try to connect what we do and say with what we believe. We are accountable to each other as community and responsible to confront in kindness. We began to expect the furniture, the worship, the meetings, even the conversations during Tippe Café, to change weekly because they are to reflect the current scriptures' gleanings and God's invitation to new life in this new moment. We move beyond forgiveness living into grace. The future began to be more important, more real than the past as we opened to being radically tradition rather than traditionally superficial. Gee....we had fun! We know how to party! And the humanity within and holiness of the scripture stories are our teachers every step along the way.**

What does it take for you to allow yourself to cry? Coming into touch with your own need? your own vulnerability? Trust that your tears will be noticed -- have faith that they will work to restore you rather than destroy you? Does it take a situation so monstrous in proportion that you are spun out of control and wiped out before you will let yourself cry? Or, are you most always filled to the brim with tears that long to be cried?

Recall the last time you cried -- a few minutes ago for some, perhaps long ago for others. Are you crying now, but not letting the tears run down your cheeks?

I believe our tears are messengers (perhaps messengers of God) that come to tell us that something important is going on inside: pay attention. Our tears are our feelings -- liquefied! Feelings anchor us personally in the issues we face and the beliefs we have. Feelings help us make connections with others. Feelings are excellent guides to understanding the complexities of our own and another's life. Feelings are a key dimension of spiritual discernment. They give us information and energy. They combine with thoughts to express our experiences. And often, our feelings run down our cheeks -- both in sorrow and in joy.

What might be the message of your tears? What are they wanting you to know? What are they washing from your eyes so that you might see more clearly -- if you are willing to see more clearly? What would it take for you to allow someone to come so close as to wipe away the tears from your eyes?

Friends, perhaps this text is saying that wiping tears from each others eyes is a holy and even Godly act. Perhaps our tears, shared and wiped away by another's listening or touch, accomplishes for God what God longs to accomplish -- the letting go of first things and the beginning of God's new creation in each of us.

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**We hardly ever do anything twice the same way and appreciate that because it gives so much energy to everything. We never do anything we don't have the energy to enjoy doing. And, our session's main purpose is to discern where God is leading us next and find ways to risk moving toward that call. (It's a good thing to not all agree as we are of one spirit and not of one mind.) And, we are very clear never to have any money on hand beyond the emergency three+ months that is wise...it needs to be spent on ministry. And doing so, in faithfulness, we have always had more than enough...living into abundance rather than the notion of scarcity. This helps all choices be conscious and intentional and everyone vitally important.**

**Tippe took note of our call into the world, a call to offer the path to well-being, the foundation of all self-growth and self-development....Tippe took note of our gifts and call and developed an outreach ministry to offer spiritual formation opportunities to those of modest income and the working poor who can not afford such experiences otherwise, and would not be likely to come Sunday morning to church to receive them. Tippe dedicated a new inclusive mission ministry to the unchurched and dischurched, the poor and disheartened. It wasn't hard to do...the Living Waters already flow, now channeled more intentionally to those beyond our walls, and with no hidden agenda of evangelizing them to be members, although many have begun to see church through new eyes given this ministry.**

God can only wipe away the tears we let roll down our cheeks. LISTEN to this. In all God's massiveness, powerfulness, hugeness, awesomeness, God chooses to become so gentle as to brush our cheek and wipe our tears -- as if God's immensity passes through a fine gauze of perception and reality to become as a butterfly wing on our cheek wiping away the past, bringing us more surely into the present, inviting us to a new future -- if we will cry the tear, feel the feelings, acknowledge our present, and look toward a future.

"To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life." The water of life is a spring of forgiveness and belonging -- cleansing and renewing baptismal waters. In baptism we are marked as God's and cleansed of our sin through Christ's death. In baptism, we receive the commitment of the community to hold us up as we make our individual faith journeys. In the sense that knowing our feelings and releasing them brings us cleansing and renewal and a new opportunity for life, our tears are mini-baptisms that roll down our cheeks just as holy baptismal waters once sprinkled our heads. Each time we cry a tear in joy or sorrow, we are brought into touch with our true feelings and have the opportunity to act upon our feelings in ways that cleanse us of what it is that troubles us; renewing in us the opportunity to make new choices. And the community is called to live into its vow to support you as it wipes away your tears -- which means we have to be physically and emotionally present to each other.

Holy waters. Holy tears. Heavenly tissues wipe them not away, but into pools of redeeming grace and new beginnings. Tears: Daily Baptisms.

(You each have) Many of you still have the crystallized tear (in your hand this morning) given out over 7 years ago. Some will now appreciate these crystals and take one for the first time. It amazes me the power this symbol still has in our lives. This crystalized tear is a drop of baptismal water preserved as a

reminder of whose you are. Remember your baptism. Feel it: forgiveness and belonging and new beginnings. Remember your baptism with each tear of living water that rolls down your cheek and allow the God who is dwelling within you -- within your neighbor-- to wipe every tear from your eye. God says, "See (See through your tears), I am making all things new." Making. In process. God is not done with us.

Teardrops of baptismal waters.  
God wiping them away and offering new life.

We opened worship this morning saying together: the person next to me is more than any description or explanation. For the person next to me is a part of the mystery of God's creation. So friends, let's look around; for God is here.

God is in process with you and me and the one sitting next to each of us. And perhaps, if we allow ourselves to cry our tears with each other and let each other wipe them away, we cleanse each other of being trapped in the present -- and we are not alone.

Open the floodgate of your heart and let yourself feel your life. Let the feelings inform your choices. Offer to someone the support they need to proceed. These are our baptismal vows to each other. Remember that the new heaven and the new earth -- the new you, the new Tippe, the new Milwaukee-- are only one heavenly tissue and one wipe of someone's hand away.

The new heaven rises from the old earth. And John's invitation, "Come, Lord Jesus, Come," is fulfilled.

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**And so, our chronologically gifted members embrace the notion of praying "colors" because some things are beyond words...they're love's energy, our Ecumenical Intergenerational VBS around the labyrinth gave rise to Tippe's wanting a permanent outdoor Baltic labyrinth that all could walk anytime....so it would touch us often and continually change the neighborhood. Our kids co-lead worship with me and not a word is kid-ified. All worship leaders sit in the pews...pastor, lay leader, choir because we are all in the need of worship and receive our call to lead from the heart of the community. No one robes. Our music is based in tone and style on the scripture stories any given week, and the abiding sense of God's call any given Sunday. (We don't have a choir but a cadre of folks and styles of sung prayer as special music.) We incorporate movement into the service through sung body prayers and liturgical dance or signing, and there is permission to get up out of your seat, change seats!, or speak up when so moved. (This is to help us move our experience down from our heads and into our bodies...to integrate what we say we believe into who we are.) We have prayer candles, enough for all, which are lighted during worship...whenever anyone feels so called, regardless of what is happening in the moment. There is self-serve agape bread available every Sunday.**

**The Re-birth of a Church...a Re-birthing of the Spirit! We are so blessed. We now are a worshipping community of 74 very active members and many friends....and growing....not too big we hope! Tippe's budget is "big" for a community our size. The ways we spend it reflect what has meaning in our lives as community, supports on-going and contemplative justice missions, offers just wages to our staff. Praise be to God....it can work! And you're invited! Come and partake of the Living Waters. In-Joy the fullness of life Tippecanoe Presbyterian Church has to offer you. And share in the good news!**