

GATHERING OURSELVES TOGETHER

Welcome

Prelude

*Opening Hymn

I Am His and He Is Mine

#602

PRESENTING OURSELVES TO GOD

*Call To Worship : (from the **Mennonite Church Canada** website.

<http://resources.mennonitechurch.ca/FileDownload/14014/Equip-116AssembluSunday.pdf>)

Leader: **We are the church that lives into God's future today.**

People: A church united across space and time.

Leader: **A church of many races, languages and ethnicities.**

People: A church that lives by the work of God in Christ that was, is now, and is still to come.

Leader: **The one who is seated on the throne says to us: "See, I am making all things new!"**

People: A new heaven and a new earth, where the home of God is among God's people.

Unison: **God's future is upon us, and it is good news.**

Remember God's future, for this is our story!

*Prayer for Forgiveness & Reconciliation (written by Moira B. Laidlaw, and posted on **Liturgies**

Online.<http://www.liturgiesonline.com.au/index.php>)

*Holy God, we praise you as the one who is the same yesterday, today and forever.
Your yearning to shower blessings on your people has not changed.*

*As you delivered the people of old from slavery in Egypt, so you deliver us from
whatever enslaves us through the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ.*

*He endured death so that he could nourish us with the sweetest gift of all—his life.
Accept our praise and adoration, we pray, for we offer them in Jesus' name and
through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen*

*Moment of Silence

*Assurance of Forgiveness

*Passing of the Peace

The Lord Be With You

And Also With You

*Gloria Patri

Announcements

Father's Day Prayer

Dear Lord, our Father in Heaven, we seek Your steady guidance and firm hand as we wander through this world. The idols of success at the expense of stillness and calm, work at the expense of family and friends, status at the expense of our identity as children of God bear down on us. Some of us have struggled with the authority of our own fathers. Some of us have felt more firmness than tenderness from our fathers. Many of us remember the tender word, the soft touch and assurance our fathers gifted us in times of trouble and for this, O Lord, we are grateful. You, O God, are our Perfect Father. May we who are fathers learn from You for the sake of our children. May we all remember the best guidance, tenderness and protection those who fathered us were able to give. And may those who grow up without fathers find the strong and solid rock of fatherly strength in those who follow You. In Christ, you have provided the model for parenting and being parented. May we always rely on him. In Christ's name, Amen.

SHARING AND PRAYING TO THE LORD

Offertory

*Doxology & Prayer of Dedication

*Hymn

I Know Not Where the Road Will Lead

#643

Sharing our Joys and Concerns

Call to Prayer & Response

PASTORAL PRAYER:

We pray on this day for:

HEALTH	JOYS	OTHER
	Birthdays -- Anniversaries -- -- Safe travel	Those who have died: Servicemen/women Churches Perry Family
<p><u>MOMENT OF SILENCE</u></p> <p>Hear our prayers, O Lord, and may all glory be to you in the name of Christ Jesus, he who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, both now and forevermore.</p> <p>We pray as Jesus taught us: OUR FATHER...</p> <p>The Lord's Prayer</p>		

Installation of New Council Members

Recognizing the Leaders of Rockland Congregational Church

Have those who are stepping down stand.

Thank you for your service to your church! We thank you for all that you have done for us, and all that you will continue to contribute to our life as a community of faith.

Today we install *Phil Anderson (Associate Moderator)*, *Karen Pier (Clerk)*, *Brenda Perkins (Treasurer)*, *Marlene Groves (Faith)*, *Jesse Ellis (Function)*, *Signe Gardner (Fellowship)*, *Brian Harden and Martha Majunka (Members-at-Large)*.

Dear friends, you have been called by God and chosen by the people of God for leadership in the church. This ministry is a blessing and a serious responsibility. It recognizes your special gifts and calls you to work among us and for us. In love we thank you for accepting your obligation and challenge you to offer your best to the Lord, to this people, and to our ministry in the world. Live a life in Christ and make him known in your witness and your work.

Installation of New Council Members and Officers

Do you this day acknowledge yourself a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ?

I do.

Will you devote yourself to the service of God in the world?

I will.

Will you so live that you enable this church to be a people of love and peace?

I will.

Will you do all in your power to be responsible to the task for which you have been chosen?

I will.

Unison Prayer

Almighty God, pour out your blessings upon these your servants who have been given ministries in your church. Grant them grace to give themselves wholeheartedly in your service. Keep before them the example of our Lord, who did not think first of himself, but gave himself for us all. Let them share his ministry and consecration, that they may enter into his joy. Guide them in their work. Reward their faithfulness with the knowledge that through them your purposes are accomplished; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Support of the Congregation

Dear friends, rejoice that God provides laborers for the vine-yards. Will you do all you can to assist and encourage them in the responsibilities to which they have been called, giving them your cooperation, your counsel, and your prayers?

We will.

Moment of Music

GOD'S WORD TO US

The Question Before Us: Is It/When Is The End of the Earth?

Readings from: *Matthew 24:3-7, 29-30, 36-44*
Revelation 7:9-12; 22:1-7

“The End of the Earth” is popular in many branches of Christian faith and is often called *“The End Times”*. *“The End Times”* is a conception of how Jesus will return, since Jesus makes it clear he will one day return, and according to the End Times tradition, Revelation tells us what that return will look like. There are many movies, books, and spokespeople for when and how all this will happen out there.

Ever since Jesus ascended to his glory in the book of Acts, people have been predicting his imminent return. The Apostle Paul believed Jesus was returning soon. In 999 AD, large groups of the faithful believed the thousand years spoken of in Revelation were up and Jesus was coming back. Many of them dressed in black gowns, fashioned whips with barbs and beads on them, and then would walk through towns whipping themselves in atonement and preparation for judgment by God.

Many of the visions of Mother Mary throughout the centuries, especially the ones at Fatima, Guadalupe, and Medjugorje are visions of the end times.

Often, people who predict the end of the Earth bring about the end of the world for the members of their own sect. Their predictions and prophecy turns out to be exactly right – for them.

Jim Jones predicted the end of the world and decided the easier approach would be for his followers to voluntarily end their lives so they wouldn't have to live through the coming tribulation.

David Koresh believed he was opening the true revelation of the Seventh Seal of the Book of Revelation, part of which consisted of the world engulfed with fire. And so it was with the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas.

In December 1999, a small group of evangelical American Christians believed they were called to usher in the End Times. They positioned themselves on the Gaza Strip in Israel, near the area of Armageddon, a town in the desert mentioned in Revelation as the beginning of the arrival of Christ. This group armed themselves and their intention was to start a global war by framing the Palestinians in an attack against Israel. They believed they were called to be agents of God's future. Fortunately, the Israeli police arrested all of them.

The earth was supposed to end last September, according to a prominent Biblical author. The end of the world has been predicted many, many times by many, many people and we are all still here to think on these things.

I think it is important to recognize that many of the people who get into the business of predicting and prophesying the end of the world are scary people. They often believe themselves to be agents of God who are active instruments of the coming end. They want to usher in the violence, bloodshed, and fear of the End of the World because they believe Jesus will return that much sooner. They have charisma, and through their charisma, they accumulate and attract people of power. With that power they garner influence, and many of them now have access to policy-makers.

With that in mind, let me give a brief run-down of ways to think about End Times.

We need to recognize that the end of the earth and the beginning of a new world is a recurring theme throughout Scripture. The concern about the end of the earth is hardwired into our belief system. We must deal with it, in the same way we had to deal with violence a few weeks ago.

The study of what is to come in the Bible is called “*eschatology*”, and the literature of eschatology is called ‘*apocalyptic literature*’. Apocalyptic books in the Bible would be the Book of Daniel and the Book of Hosea, and of course Revelation. Apocalyptic stories would be stories like Sodom and Gomorrah, the story of Noah, some of the prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel, and some of the parables of Jesus. Let me begin with the easy answer to all of this:

It is always the end of the earth and world as we know it; the end has already happened; and the end will continue to happen into the future.

With that, there are three approaches to understanding eschatology and apocalyptic literature in the Bible.

First, we can understand stories and writings that point to the future **literally**. This means to read, say, the predictions in Revelation as speaking to real events. It means to read the Bible at face value. There is no shading by way of symbols or spiritualized stories.

What it says is what it means.

A burning bush is a burning bush and there is no symbolic meaning to such a thing.

This is what **Literal** means.

There are two things I have to say about this way of reading Scripture in general and Revelation in particular.

First, if you or anyone else reads the Book of Revelation and pretends to understand the meaning of the Book, particularly in a literal sense, you need to run the other direction. There is no prediction of the end of the world in Revelation in any way we would understand 'prediction'.

The Book of Revelation and the apocalyptic literature of Scripture does, however, give us a way to view the world. There are literal markers of the symbolic images in the Bible and our access to those markers are far greater now than they ever have been.

Those warnings are now present in our mind and daily interaction with media by way of global warming, the threat of nuclear destruction, killer meteorites, natural disasters.

Those are all very literal and very real things.

We can live in fear of these things fulfilling our expectation of the End of the Earth, which as we learned last week is how we choose evil rather than the good, and continue our worry and fear into the future. This is a catastrophic mindset and is contrary to the life of faith. If you need Biblical authority on that, read Matthew 6 and what Jesus has to say about catastrophic thinking.

Second, the literal approach to reading Revelation and the rest of Scripture directly contradicts Jesus' word to us today.

"You don't get to know that information, and nor will you know."

The literal approach also contradicts God's promises in the Old Testament,

particularly the promise made to Noah, which says, quite simply, until you are no longer able to harvest the land God has given you, God will maintain the earth for the people.

The second approach to reading Revelation and other predictions in the Bible is to **spiritualize** all these readings. This makes eschatological writings and apocalyptic literature completely symbolic. The writings and prophecies are speaking only to our spiritual lives, and these words are not literal in any way. In other words, Revelation and the End Times have no relevance for our literal, material lives.

But this approach has problems as well. Spiritualizing everything contradicts what Jesus tells us in several places, which is to always be prepared for his return, to essentially be prepared for the world to end tomorrow. This is the point of the parable of the 10 bridesmaids, which we skipped over in our reading today.

Stay awake, Jesus says, because the end may be here very soon.

But this doesn't mean to live in fear; instead it means to live in expectant joy that the Lord will be fully present with us very soon.

The other challenge to the spiritualized reading of Revelation is very simple. At any given time, someone's world around us is ending.

What will we do about that personal apocalypse as a follower of Christ?

The third approach to Revelation and prophecies of the end of the earth in Scripture is the one I think works best. It is the **mythic and poetic approach**. This allows us to see through the symbols and signs in a way that allows us to engage the world around us at any given time armored in Christ, as the Book of Ephesians says. There it says to approach the always coming apocalypse in this way:

¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. (Eph 6:12-18)

Because we are armored in Christ, when we walk out into our everyday lives we see where the Red Dragons are right now, where the Seven Seals are being unleashed.

Perhaps the dragon is now dressed like a rapacious corporation poisoning our water supply, or perhaps the whore of Babylon is a power-hungry arm of the government fulfilling a bizarre and brutal interpretation of the law of the land.

Perhaps the fifth or the sixth seal is presenting itself as an outbreak of cholera in an impoverished favela, or a natural disaster unfolding in a poor coastal area.

How will we respond, armored as we are in God and Christ?

When I say, *respond* I don't really mean political activism, though it might include that. What I mean is how will we literally respond, person to person, to these signs and symbols in the world right now?

How will we communicate the spiritual truths that are beyond circumstance, while at the same time providing comfort and hope to the circumstance?

The mythic and poetic approach to apocalyptic literature allows us to apply what we are reading personally, rather than projecting into the world and making the end of the earth about everyone else and their faithlessness.

As an example, perhaps we could read the seven churches in the beginning of Revelation as ways of being church in the world, especially in a world that does not honor the faith.

Maybe the seven seals are a way to imagine the trials and tribulations in our lives and the lives of others. This way, we approach the end of the earth not out of fear but to ignite and fuel our faith, to seek deeper ways to become more like Christ with our neighbor.

Because here is the *literal, spiritual, and poetic truth* of all the talk about End Times in Scripture:

The goal of the apocalypse has nothing to do with judgment, or anything we can predict.

No, what the End Times has to do with is the incredible image of all the multitudes gathered before God:

9 After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰They cried out in a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!'

The multitude, are you and I and everyone else, gathered together to worship the Lord in all the light, love and peace you can imagine, and even more so, all the love, light, and peace you can't imagine.

And that, my brothers and sisters in Christ, is how the Earth and the world ends.

Amen.

ENTERING THE WORLD

*Closing Hymn

I Know Whom I Have Believed

#493

*Benediction

Musical Postlude