SERMON FOR APRIL 7, 2013

Scripture: Revelation 1:4-8
Theme: We are called into a future that had its beginning with God and will end with God.
Subject: Living into our future with God
Desired Objective: To be made now into a kingdom and priests serving our God.
Title: So it is to Be. Amen.

The future is impossible to avoid. It comes upon us whether we want it to or not. Our only good choice is to do what we can now to shape for ourselves a future of hope and promise. We don’t often stop and think a lot about this. We more often take life as it comes. That can be good and that can be bad. It is good when it is a matter of not worrying about the future. God doesn’t want us to worry about the future. As I hope we will discover in our text God has already acted to take away our worry and give us a future in his presence. God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Our lives are totally encompassed by the One who is and who was and who is to come.

Because of our trust in God the Christian life, therefore, is not a life of anxiousness about the future. Anxiousness is the opposite of faith. Jesus encourages us to live an anxious free life. He spoke of how God makes provision for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field and he said to his disciples, “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.” It is good, then, to live in the calm assurance of God’s grace and provision for our lives.

But living for only the present time and moment can also be bad. It is bad when there is no looking ahead to a future that is surely coming upon us. That is, when there is no preparation to enter into that future. There are some who live that way. They do not think about what will happen if they live to be 60, 70, 80 years old. They are content to live just for today, putting nothing aside for their old age. I recently spent a lot of time with a man who has lived his life mostly in that way. And now in his old age and with some severe disabilities he does not have even a sure roof over his head when he lies down to sleep. If we neglect our present opportunities we can live into a future of despair and pain.

So we are called to think about where our lives are headed. How we are going to arrive at that place we want and need to be.
Albert Einstein was one of the greatest geniuses the world has ever known but he was not a highly organized man when it came to his own personal life. The story is told about a time he was traveling by train. The conductor came through the train punching the tickets of each passenger. When he came to Albert Einstein he of course recognized the famous scientist but he asked for his ticket none-the-less. Albert Einstein began a frantic search for his ticket. He checked his pockets, his folder, the seat, but he could not find his ticket. The conductor said to him, “This alright, Dr. Einstein, we all know who you are and I am confident you purchased a ticket when you boarded the train.” The conductor then moved on to the next passenger and as he did he noticed that Einstein was on his knees on the floor of the train looking under the seat. Again he said to him, “It’s alright, Dr. Einstein, I know who you are.” Albert Einstein looked up at him and said, “Young man, I too know who I am but I don’t know where I am going.”

Some of us may be like that. We don’t know where we are going. That is to say, we do not have a clue about what our future should be. But the future is coming and there are choices we can make now that will shape our future into a better place to be. For what happens in the future in some ways begins right now. We are in fact living our way into the future.

The future, beloved, is a time of both promise and threat. John in Revelation makes that quite clear. It is a time of promise for those who look to the One who has made us to be a kingdom and priests serving the Lord our God, but it is a time of threat for those who conspired against him and put him to death. The words of John unmistakably arouse feelings of both promise and threat. “Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen.”

Beloved, our talk about the future this morning is not for the purpose of arousing in you feelings of fear. It is about living confidently into the future that God wants for us. And the future of which I speak is not primarily the future we will have with God in heaven. That future does await us. In the confessional language of our Scripture, God is our destiny. God is the one from whom we have come and the one to whom we go—the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega. Our future in its ultimate dimension is with Him. But it is not that future to which I direct your attention this morning. It is the future into which we are living now. It is the future of tomorrow, next week, next year, and
the years thereafter that God permits us to have on this earth. For those years also can be either years of promise and hope or years of pain and sorrow. And which they will be largely depends upon decisions and choices we make now.

The future God wants for us is one full of promise and hope. It does not wait for us to pass through portals of heaven for this future to be ours. It is in fact the gift of God to his people now. For it is what Christ by his death and resurrection has made us to be. John writes in his eulogy: “To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

What John describes for us in this verse of scripture is our future story. It is what God wants for us—to be a kingdom and priest serving our God. John is primarily speaking not about what will be in heaven but of God’s intention for us now on earth—to be here and now a kingdom and priests serving our God. It is a vision that calls us forward to be everything God wants us to be.

Our Vision Team is presently working on a vision of our future as church. They are putting together material, some of which many of you have supplied from your prayer triads. In the prayer triads we have been seeking to know what God’s will is for us. What is God calling us to do and be as church in the 21st century? What is that special mission God has for us? In the prayer triads we are engaged in a discerning process to see that more clearly and then to focus more intentionally upon what God’s will is for us. Hopefully what will come out of this effort is our own future story. That is the Vision Team’s task—to write our future story. To put together a compelling vision that will call us forward to be the best we can be for the sake of Christ. Fundamental to our understanding of this is the vision we are given in Revelation, chapter one. In Christ we are called to be a kingdom, priests serving our God and Father.

What does it mean to be made into a kingdom and priests serving our God and Father? To be a kingdom as John speaks of it is not to be a place of pomp and power as the world may think of that. Rather it is to be a people among whom God’s will is humbly and obediently done. It is that for which we pray every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer. “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” That is really what being church is about. It is not so much about believing certain doctrines, holding to certain creeds, having a particular kind of worship service. Those
things have a place and they can help or hinder, but that is not what it means to be a kingdom of our God. It is about being a people over whom God reigns and who therefore do God’s will on earth. It is being a people who are passionate about the things God is passionate about, who love as God loves. Now, of course, we hope the Vision team will flesh out some of the details and particulars of what it means for us to do God’s will, but overall this is the future to which we are called—to be a kingdom where God’s will is done.

And to be priests serving our God and Father is to speak of the servant’s role that is given to each of us. Beloved, we are not elected to positions of power and prominence when we are made into a kingdom of our God. We are also not elected to be anonymous and uninvolved members of God’s kingdom. We become servants—priests serving our God. The purpose of priests is of course to actually function in the ministries of God. It is not a title. It is a role to fulfill. We may or may not be doing that so well right now. That is why we are looking to what we are calling our future story. How can we live our way more fully into the priestly roles God has given us? With the details and particulars of our future story written out we hope that also will become quite clear.

It is, after all, our future together as a kingdom and priests serving our God that we are talking about this morning. Because it is a vision from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth it is a future full of promise and hope. It is the future I believe we want for ourselves and for the whole church. And by the power and grace of the One who is and who was and who is to come, so it is to be. Amen.