*Who Is to Come*

Revelation 1:4-8

The Book of Revelation is a writing that has generated countless interpretations and misinterpretations throughout the centuries. Biblical scholars and preachers have tried their hand at decoding the mysterious images and events included in its pages. Books, including best sellers have been written in an attempt to give meaning and clarity for our day and age. Our desire to pinpoint times and events that the book seems to allude to have produced fears and end time thinking for centuries. Cataclysmic events have led people to believe they are in the midst of the thousand years reign mention or the times of the horsemen. My own understanding of Revelation veers away from the pinpoint mentality to the richer meaning of the messages of hope found throughout those pages. Its images portray God’s struggle to recreate this world into one that exists in god’s righteousness. The message of hope that pervades its words tell me that God is ultimately in control and will ultimately achieve His divine purposes. One point of view about Revelation is that the book was written by John to bring words of hope to a people who were beginning to suffer from persecution at the hands of the Roman Empire. In the adult Sunday school class we have been studying the book’s meaning in light of the persecution of Christians as Emperor worship began to fear and hate the new Christian believers.

John, a follower of Jesus is exiled to the island of Patmos. Today Patmos is a beautiful island, but then it was a place for those deemed and danger to society. John is limited in his ability to share the fire of his faith, so he chooses to write his incredible experiences of God and his insight into what God is doing in this world, especially through Jesus. John uses the apocalyptic images prevalent in his day to weave God’s word into story. His writing deals with the cosmic struggle, the struggle between evil and righteousness. Many believe that John uses the events of his own time to tell of God’s struggle. Let us listen to John’s concept of beginning and end, the God who was and is and is to come. (Read Revelation 1:4-8)

As a child, I always seemed to be getting into trouble. I don’t think half of what I was blamed for was truly my fault, but I did get blamed. One of the punishments for my incorrigibleness, especially in the spring and summer time was to be handed a table knife and made to dig dandelions out of the yard. Always I had the hope that by digging the dandelions out one year, the next there would be none for me to dig. But what is it about dandelions? No matter how hard we work to get rid of them, each year there is a brand new crop. They seem to edevelop bigger and deeper roots, and more of them come up where one of them was dug up last year. Each year one of the first signs of spring is the emergence of those yellow head, bursting out almost instantaneously, proclaiming and taunting, “Aha, here I am again! I’m bigger and better and badder than last year. You can’t defeat me. I’ll be here today and tomorrow and always.” (In those days and in my yard they didn’t know about True Green and other lawn chemicals) And once again I was stuck digging those blessed dandelions out one by one. I think my mother knew that was the punishment that would never end. She could count on those dandelions to be there very year just to keep me in line. The dandelions had my attention and I began to think that nothing but dandelions grew in our yard. What I didn’t pay much attention to was that the grass grew up every year too. I didn’t realize that if the grass didn’t grow every year as well, the dandelions would be the plant of choice choking out every other plant that could grow in our lawn. And it was the lush green of grass that sparkled with the early morning dwe, that created the softness for bare fee, and provided a wonderful place to sit and ponder the mysteries of life.

The grass and the dandelions may be a good illustration of God’s struggle in recreating this life and our reactions to that struggle. If we allow the dandelions to represent the fruits of our sin, we can better understand the tenacity of sin to rear its ugly head often. We try to do our best to live good lives, to follow in Christ’s footsteps and lead a righteous life. But all too often we fall short. We continue to sin even when we give life our best efforts.

And we are bombarded by the evidences of sin we see in this world, the killing and maiming in conflict, crimes committed against one another, selfishness and greed in our corporation, infidelity in our leaders, blaming everybody else but ourselves, murderous deeds committed out of anger, terrorism. We could name any day a least one result of sin in our newscasts. It all too easily appears that this world is falling apart and that God is not winning. The focus in on all the terrible stuff happening in this world.

A few years back there was a news report about a little girl who survived ten days beside her mother, who as killed when their car plowed through a guard rail and crashed into a ravine below. First efforts to look for the care failed and it was not until ten days later that the car was found and the little girl was still alive. That story, tucked away among the conflict of Iraq and the murders and violence in Detroit, was a powerful reminder for me that this is still a good world, and good things still happen. But we get pulled away from noticing those things by noticing the bad things that happen. Sensationalism is what we call it. We are at the same time repulsed and fascinated by the wages of sin. We hate what we see in the media, but we are also drawn to it. A field of dandelions can be a beautiful sight, unless we have a lawn nest door to it. We see the beautiful field as a threat to what we really prize, a lawn full of lush green grass. It can happen anywhere else in the world, but not in our backyard.

Because we have faith, we are not immune to the consequences of sin. We often are victims of the sins of those around us and we are sometimes the ones who sin and cause others to be victims of our sin. The dandelions sprout everywhere, even in places no other plant will grow. I find them in the cracks of sidewalks, in the stone in the plants around my house, in the over watered places in fields, up by buildings. Sin seems to find its way into the most illogical places, the places we carefully prepare by growing and developing in our faith. Sometimes we have to dig deep to root out our sin, to find its source and keep it from having power over us.

When I was a kindergartner, I got on the wrong bus one day. It was a traumatic experience. One of my friend’s mother took me home and guess what my angry mother punished me with, digging dandelions. My own anger at my son who took a wrong bus home with a friend was very great and when his friend’s parents returned him, I thanked them with a nice smile pasted to my face. When they were gone, my anger flared up and instead of telling my son I was glad he was safe and not to do that again without me knowing, I exploded, dragged him by the arm, marched him to his room and told him I didn’t want to see him the rest of the day. (Hmmm, generational wages of sin?)

But the green grass of forgiveness eventually worked its way into that time and place and our good mother/son relationship was reestablished. The grass grew up around the dandelions. Good ness grows up around sin when people live in right relationship with God. All generations have fallen short. But God continues to work God’s purposes. The green grass of faith continue to grow. And God has been the timeless element, the mover and shaker of it all. Ours is a God who was and is and is to come. And that is the hope that we live in no matter how many dandelions, no matter how much sin seems to be prevailing in this world. God will ultimately see this world to its conclusion and divine purposes. God’s justice and righteousness and goodness will prevail. That is the hope that gets us through the loss of a loved one, the discovery that we have a debilitating or fatal disease. That is the hope when our strength, and peace have been replaced by the trauma of divorce, alienation and hurts of life. We can count on god’s righteousness being triumphant. John knew that no matter how powerful the effects of sin, God would still overcome and accomplish what He set out to do. John knew that he could strengthen and courage those who were being persecuted with his powerful images and extraordinary metaphors. At a time when Emperor Domitian was demanding his peo9le call him, “Lord and god”, John found a way to give hope to a dar4k time in Christianity. Because John found a way to put into words his unshakeable belief that God’s purposes could not be destroyed, those early Christians could go on sharing he gospel even in the face of death.

That means that we can pray with confidence that God will respond, sometimes with answer that at first seem to contradict what we ask for, but work out to be just exactly what was needed. God is the Alpha and the Omega and we are the priests serving God. What is the worst that could happen to us? Some would say that the ultimate price we pay is death, but I challenge that. Death does not hold sway over those who believe that there is life beyond death. Before we are born, God is there. After we die, God is there also. We just celebrated the resurrection Jesus. God’s purposes prevailed when Jesus came back to witness to the power of life over death. What do we really need to fear? God is in it all. The grass of God’s purpose continues to grow, and we continue to fight the dandelions of sin with our faith and love. And the God we love will prevail.