

Over and Over (29May22)  
Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21

There once was a man named Michael Finnegan. He had whiskers on his chin-negan. The wind blew them off and they grew in again. Poor old Michael Finnegan. Begin again. There once was a man named Michael Finnegan he had...

Here we are again. And you may well not want to be here again.

I don't mean in worship, though I wouldn't argue with that. You may, indeed, wonder why you do this weekly, or even sporadically, why you have to keep coming, repeating these patterns, sitting through yet another sermon trying to offer assurances.

But then again, it seems you continue to need it.

A card I got almost exactly a year ago from Lisa Johnsen said, "It is not true that life is one damn thing after another. It is one damn thing over and over."<sup>\*</sup>

That especially seems true in America this week: one damn thing over and over. Last Sunday you showed up for worship after a gruesome shooting spree, a young white man who planned and proceeded to kill ten Black people while they went about their daily life. This Sunday you show up for worship, still climbing out of a gruesome shooting spree, where a young man apparently planned and proceeded to kill children going about the early part of their daily life. These were the big ones, but there were more instances of gun violence in these weeks, not to mention the burden you may feel with the accumulation of tragedy and wanton loss of life over the years. One damn thing over and over.

It's awful enough once, compounded as it keeps happening in a litany I don't care to repeat of the commonplaces turned into horror scenes. As the President said, "the list goes on and on." You, too, may be sick and tired.<sup>\*\*</sup>

Alongside that central tragedy we witness to, of course gun violence isn't the only damnable over and over. It's also week-in week-out from Ukraine dragging on without resolution, and stock markets and economic fears of inflation and recession that constantly command headlines for months, and of course the grind of the pandemic, inescapable and unending as it refuses to abate or dissipate and won't let us go, surging over and over, the damn thing.

These are also met by the smaller scale. This week I was with people who kept getting dragged back into addictions—their own or of family members—over and over. And health diagnoses that recur with bad news. And housing that won't remain secure. And repairs needing more repairing. And struggles with personal identity. And lingering grief. And haunting demons of depression. The conversations I've been part of this week silently march along with the secrets of your daily worries and sleepless nights, personal doubts and insufficiencies, one after another, or maybe one damn thing over and over.

I don't say this to obscure the good, the sunny days you enjoy, the beauties of spring, the hopes for the end of the school year, the delights with loved ones, the new things arising for you.

But I do take seriously that you frequently have to begin again. You experience the repetition of tragedy.

And I suspect that's part of why you come to church. For the alternative repetition of good, the repetition of hope, the recitation of promise.

That's also the pattern of Revelation. It began saying I am the Alpha and Omega, and ends saying I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end. It's a nice frame for Jesus' message. But even more, we need the reminder. As it's one damn thing over and over, we need a real blessing over and over...and over! Through the recurrences of the curse, you need the promise reiterated, assuring that, for all the struggles, your life is and our world is held in God's blessedness.

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<sup>\*</sup> Edna St. Vincent Millay

<sup>\*\*</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/05/24/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-school-shooting-in-uvalde-texas/>

We've been walking through the Revelation, so you have more familiarity than what our general or even warped concept is. Here, we're at the end. In this final part of the vision, we encounter the new Jerusalem. This beautiful bride, as it's portrayed, is a contrast with the harlot of Babylon we heard about a couple weeks ago. Where the harlot was ugly and so gross as even to be drinking sewage, the bride is adorned in all kinds of gems, with streets of gold.

Some say the vision is a return to Eden. I say it's more: instead of forbidden fruit in the center of the garden, the tree mentioned today beside a clear river bears fruit every month of the year, with leaves for the healing of the nations.

Also mentioned are gates. These are the pearly gates, but not like cartoons picture with St. Peter and his keys (Matthew 16:19) as a gatekeeper. These 12 gates are described as each a single pearl, and the gates are never shut! Everyone is welcome to come in, even those who seemed previously excluded in the vision. All are invited in.

As a vision of abundant welcome, the size of the city is depicted as a 1500-mile cube, which not only would stretch from here beyond New Orleans, to Tuscon, up to Spokane and back, but still more is like a skyscraper 24 times taller than Jeff Bezos flew! That may serve as its own example of the point of Revelation, not to be enamored of the glory of the beast, since the glory you're already promised and welcomed into is so much bigger.

With that, though, again we'll say that Revelation isn't about a prediction for sometime yet to come, or at least not mainly that. Mainly it's for now. Its vision is not that the current world doesn't matter; it's that it usually gets it wrong. As Martin Luther King reminded us in what turned out to be his last sermon, "It's all right to talk about 'long white robes over yonder,' ...all right to talk about the new Jerusalem, but one day, God's preacher must talk about the new New York, the new Atlanta, the new Philadelphia," and maybe we add the new Uvalde, new Mariupol, and even new Madison.\*\*\*

The President asked, "when in God's name will we do what we all know in our gut needs to be done?" The vision of Revelation isn't putting it off but proclaims that enduring now in faith is worthwhile. You can begin again, finding courage, struggling to make the peaceful holy city of Jerusalem more real, to live against the harlot of Babylon and beast that devours and kills and thrives on economic injustice. It's not to put you on hold for waiting, but to live now already (or all ready).

For Revelation, faithful response to God isn't about predicting dates when Jesus will come, but an assurance that he is close. He both comes and he calls us to come. It's a coming together, which is exactly what we do right now, preparing us for God's grander future, but also for another week of having to confront one damn thing over and over.

The very final word of the Bible is that the grace of Jesus is with you. Amen

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\*\*\* "I See the Promised Land," in *A Testament of Hope* p282