

## Making All Things New

*He will wipe every tear from their eyes,  
and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain,  
for the old order has passed away.  
The One who sat on the throne said,  
“Behold, I make all things new.” – Revelation 21:4-5*

“The more things change, the more they stay the same.” At some point in your health care ministry, you’ve probably heard someone say these words. Likely it was an elderly patient or a long-time co-worker who’s “been around the block a couple of times.” Maybe the words have even slipped from your own mouth: “The more things change, the more they stay the same.”

Often these words are accompanied by a sigh and shaking of the head. Even in a time when everything feels like it is moving at a frantic pace — a time when change feels rapid and relentless — there are some things that seem impervious to change. We can have new leaders, but the same problems persist. New policies, but the same old outcomes. The young still die before their time. The sick still struggle to receive affordable care. Racial inequities still exist. At the “big picture level” will anything ever *really change*?

The early Christians experienced the same discouragement. Maybe it’s a surprise to hear this because they had just witnessed one of the greatest “changes” of all time to the ordinary order of things: a man risen from the dead. And, yes, in some ways the Easter message turned *everything* on its head. It meant that even though the Romans with all of their power had named Jesus a criminal and put him to death, God was on Jesus’ side and had vindicated him. It was confirmation that the beautiful, just, inclusive picture of the world that Jesus preached in his time on earth was *God’s* dream for the world as well. And in those weeks following the resurrection, it felt as if that new world could be coming right around the corner. Indeed, in the Jewish tradition of the first believers, the resurrection of the dead was a sign that the Kingdom of God was imminent — that God’s vision for earth was about to be realized.

But then in the weeks and months and years following Jesus’ resurrection, the Romans continued to oppress the people. Indeed, the earliest Christians themselves faced persecution by the emperors Nero and Domitian. The young still died before their time. The healthy still got sick. Injustices in the new community continued to spring up. Had the resurrection of Jesus *really* made any difference in the world at all?

Exiled on a tiny, rocky island off the coast of modern-day Turkey, a disciple named John of Patmos claimed that it did. Somewhere around the year 95 CE, he wrote down a series of visions that had come to him in prayer. Visions making clear that the resurrection of Christ was an event of cosmic significance. Even though all of the effects of this event were not immediately evident, a “seed” of immense and inevitable consequence had sprouted on Easter morning. It was still in the process of coming to fruit, but it *was* coming to fruit. The “old order” of “death, mourning, wailing and pain” *was* turning over. God *was* in the process of re-creating the earth and fashioning it into a new place. We still don’t quite know how we are going to get from our moment in history to the end of the story, but the end of the story has already been written, John claimed, and it is good.

Every year during the Easter season, we continue to read from John’s book of Revelation with all of its dream-like, symbolic language. While many of John’s visions seem bizarre in the modern age, the vividness of his imagery continues to pique our hope. This week let us join John and all of the mystics throughout the centuries who help us see the hidden currents of history on a grand scale. For in the words of the 20<sup>th</sup> century mystic, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “The future is more beautiful than all the pasts.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Letter (September 5, 1919) in *The Making of a Mind: Letters from a Soldier-Priest (1914-1919)*