

INTRODUCTION

Today, we are beginning a new series on the book of Revelation.

Where some people use the book of Revelation to sow hatred, we want to use it to sow love.

Where some people use it to sow hurt, we want to use it to sow forgiveness.

Where some people use it to sow fear, we want to use it to sow faith.

Where some people use it to sow despair, we want to use it to sow hope.

Where some people use it to sow shadows, we want to use it to sow light.

And where some people use it to sow sadness, we want to use it to sow joy.

It's our great hope that you will use the book of Revelation to sow those things, too.

To help us think about the message of the book of Revelation, we're using a book by Lutheran pastor Matthew Ian Fleming titled *The End Is The Beginning: Revelation, Hope, and the Love That Lit the Stars*.

We love that title, *The End Is The Beginning*, so we are naming this preaching series *The End Is The Beginning*.

It's an upside down way of thinking

I am an upside down thinker.

To be an upside-down thinker is to embrace a way of seeing the world that runs contrary to conventional wisdom and societal norms.

It is a mindset rooted in humility, justice, and compassion—where success is not measured by wealth or power, but by love and service.

This way of thinking echoes the teaching of Jesus, who said, "The last will be first, and the first will be last."

In this upside-down kingdom, greatness is found in servanthood, and power is shown through vulnerability.

An upside-down thinker does not glorify the strong over the weak or the rich over the poor.

Instead, they ask: Who is being overlooked? Who is being silenced? And how can I lift them up?

They challenge systems that reward self-interest and exclusion, and instead live in solidarity with those on the margins.

Their vision is not clouded by status, but sharpened by compassion.

They see dignity where the world sees shame and potential where others see failure.

This way of thinking often looks foolish in the eyes of the world.

It may mean choosing generosity over accumulation, or forgiveness over vengeance.

It requires courage, because it challenges the very structures that many rely on for identity and security.

But the upside-down thinker understands that real transformation—of society, of the heart—begins when we invert our priorities and recognize that everyone has a place at the table.

In doing so, we don't just flip social hierarchies; we redefine what it means to be human.

To think upside-down is to hope in a different kind of world, where the meek inherit the earth, where mercy triumphs over judgment, and where love—not fear—has the final word.

It is a call to live not by domination, but by grace.

SEEING JESUS IN THE CLOUDS

The image of God should never be rooted in fear, domination, or punishment.

Instead, it must be grounded in love—radical, liberating love that invites us into deeper relationship, not trembling obedience.

For too long, many have inherited an image of God as a distant judge, ready to condemn.

But this image is distorted.

The true God revealed through Jesus Christ is one who walks with the poor, touches the leper, eats with sinners, and forgives even those who crucify Him.

This is not a God of fear, but a God of mercy—a God of liberation.

God's love is not soft or sentimental; it is disruptive.

It breaks chains, lifts the lowly, and humbles the proud.

It inverts the world's logic—this is the essence of the upside down kingdom, where the first are last and the last are first.

In this kingdom, love is not a luxury;

it is a force that transforms systems of oppression and restores human dignity.

Fear may control, but only love can liberate.

When we imagine God through fear, we create communities of exclusion, shame, and silence.

But when we see God as love, we build communities of justice, healing, and welcome.

A fearful image of God keeps us small.

A loving image of God calls us to grow, to serve, to become co-creators of a more compassionate world.

To believe in a God of love is to believe in the possibility of liberation—not only for the oppressed, but for the oppressor, not only from chains, but from hatred, greed, and fear itself.

This is the heart of the gospel: not that we must earn God's love, but that it is already ours, freely given.

And in receiving it, we are called to mirror it—to live as citizens of that upside down kingdom, where love rules all.

Story I

I was sitting with a parishioner on the steps at the front of the church.

The afternoon traffic was building up on Rutherford Street, and a steady stream of cars rolled slowly and steadily to the stop light and then beyond to the rest of their days.

"Look at that Mustang," she said. "I remember the 1968 Shelby Cobra Mustangs. Their engines were so powerful, their drivers could punch the accelerator and the G Force would keep you from being able to put your hands on the dash board. Wow."

"Look at those wrens," she said. "I'm glad they're our state bird. They're so small and feisty. They're wonderful."

This is one of the many things I admire about this friend. She looks closely and listens carefully. She sees and she hears.

We sat quietly in the warmth of the afternoon sun.

Of a hundred cars that passed us by, the people in only two of them turned, looked at us, smiled and waved.

All of the wrens came near to us, hopped up and down to say, "Hello," and flew back to their nests.

"This is how it is to be on the streets. People passing by without looking at you. Only the birds seeing you," I thought with a deep sigh.

"Hey sweet lady, how you doing today?"

The loud voice of the lady walking down the street with a case of beer under her arm and a bag of McDonalds fast food in her hand brought me out of my reverie.

She veered over and hugged my friend.

She gave me a fist bump and a "How you doin'" with a smile as warm and bright as the sun itself.

"Are you hungry, baby?" she asked my friend. "Have you ate anything today."

"Well," said my friend, "I had a breakfast bar and a bottle of water, but that's all. I am kind of hungry."

The lady opened the McDonald's bag, took out a double cheeseburger, and placed it gently in my friend's hand.

She kissed my friend's cheek ever so lightly, ever so tenderly.

She moved on down the sidewalk to the corner of Rutherford Street and Stone Avenue.

"I've seen the face of God today," I whispered in reverence. "I've seen your face, dear God."

WHO WILL WAIL WHEN JESUS COMES AGAIN?

Story II

In 1960, six-year-old Ruby Bridges made history as the first Black child to integrate the all-white William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Her walk into the school became a powerful symbol of courage during the Civil Rights Movement.

Each morning, federal marshals escorted her through a hostile crowd of white parents and protestors.

Ruby, small and composed, wore a white dress and carried her lunch box—her face calm, determined, and heartbreakingly innocent.

Her expression rarely changed; she did not cry or yell.

Instead, her stoic gaze, far older than her years, revealed a quiet strength that stood in stark contrast to the fury around her.

White protestors lined the sidewalks with hateful signs.

Some read "Keep Our School White" and "We Want Segregation."

Others were even more vicious, showing grotesque images or hurling slurs.

Adults screamed at a child with faces twisted in rage, and yet Ruby pressed forward.

She often prayed under her breath as she walked, her expression unwavering.

Inside the school, she was taught alone for over a year by one teacher, Mrs. Barbara Henry, as white parents pulled their children from the classroom in protest.

Ruby's courage was extraordinary for a child so young.

She did not fully grasp the depth of the hate directed toward her, but she understood that she was doing something important.

Her face—sometimes solemn, sometimes curious—became an emblem of quiet resistance.

The dignity in her eyes unsettled many and inspired others.

Ruby Bridges did not speak loudly, but her presence and her poise spoke volumes.

Her brave walk through that crowd was not just a step for her but a giant leap for America's pursuit of justice.

Her face, filled with courage, changed the face of American education.

WE WILL ALL BE A PART OF THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

Story III

The final scene of *Places in the Heart* (1984), starring Sally Field, delivers a profound and emotional conclusion through a symbolic and spiritual communion.

Set in a small Texas town during the Great Depression, the film culminates not with dramatic action but with a quiet, powerful moment inside a church.

The scene opens with the congregation seated in pews, listening to a sermon about love, forgiveness, and unity.

As the camera pans across the faces in the church, the significance of this gathering becomes clear—it transcends time, conflict, and even death.

Edna Spalding (Sally Field), who has endured the loss of her husband and the struggles of keeping her farm, sits peacefully among familiar townspeople.

Then, in a deeply moving moment, the camera reveals characters who had died or been estranged earlier in the film—her late husband Royce, the young Black man Moses who helped her save her farm, and even the young white boy who accidentally shot Royce.

They all sit together, passing the communion tray down the row.

What makes this scene extraordinary is its quiet, surreal beauty.

There are no words exchanged.

Instead, emotions are conveyed through the characters' expressions—soft, reflective, forgiving.

Edna's face holds both weariness and grace.

When she turns to Moses and says gently, "The peace of God," he replies, "The peace of God," with a look of calm acceptance.

This moment is not literal but symbolic—a vision of healing, of community beyond racial and social barriers, and of the redemption possible through shared suffering and grace.

The final scene offers the viewer a sense of closure and hope, portraying an ideal of unity in the face of hardship.

It is a haunting, beautiful ending that lingers long after the film fades to black.

CONCLUSION

Beloved community,

We gather today not only to remember the sufferings of the poor, the forgotten, and the excluded—but to speak a deeper truth: that liberation is not only for the oppressed, but also for the oppressor.

God's dream is not a kingdom of division, but of communion.

It is not enough for chains to be broken; hearts must be transformed.

In the Gospel, Jesus stands with the poor, with the hungry, with the ones whose feet are tired from marching and whose voices have grown hoarse from crying out.

He says, "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the Kingdom of God."

But this Kingdom is not only a place of comfort for the afflicted; it is a call to conversion for those who afflict.

The poor are not objects of charity—they are agents of grace.

And the rich, the powerful, the indifferent?

They, too, must be liberated—from greed, from fear, from the lie that their humanity is separate from the rest.

Liberation theology teaches us that sin is not only personal—it is social, structural.

When we tolerate injustice, we crucify Christ again.

But when we break bread across the lines that divide us—rich and poor, Black and white, citizen and stranger—we announce that a new creation is possible.

The beloved community, as Dr. King called it, is not an abstract dream.

It is the real, radical promise of the Gospel.

It is the Kingdom of God breaking into history.

It begins when the last are made first, when the hungry are fed, and when those who once stood on the necks of others fall to their knees and say, "Forgive me, for I did not see."

True liberation is not revenge.

It is reconciliation.

It is justice kissed by mercy.

It is the mighty brought low—not to be humiliated, but to be humanized.

So we must labor not only for the release of the captives, but for the healing of the jailer.

This is the work of Christ.

This is the cross and the resurrection.

And in this work, we are no longer strangers, but brothers and sisters, building together the Kingdom—where all are free, and all are beloved.