

“I AM the Alpha and Omega”

Revelation 1:4-8

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Begin with a clip from “A River Runs Through It”

Poetics

Something about poetry that just speaks to me.

seems that the place where words fall short, poetry and song picks up

I think this is why I love the psalms - poetry and song wed to become one.

And something about running water that resonates deep within my soul.

Rivers, waterfalls, rainfall - there is something in me that finds peace in flowing water

It like a deep sigh of the soul in those sacred places.

I was talking about that this week with Larry Owenby, in fact.

And though these words were not poetry in a strict sense, they were poetic in ways much deeper.

They were words from a short story by Norman McClean.

They are words that mean something far deeper than their literal meaning.

And I think this is what our scripture this morning is saying as well.

It is pointing to something far deeper than what we see on the surface.

Read Revelation 1:4-8

“I AM the Alpha and Omega”

First things - The New Testament was not written in English, but in Greek.

Alpha = the first letter of the Greek alphabet

Omega = the last letter of the Greek alphabet

(Slide about the symbol for Jesus - Chi Ro)

I am the “A” and the “Z” - Jesus says.

But what does that mean?

When I hear that phrase, “I am the Alpha,”

I am immediately drawn to the scripture in Colossians 1:15-17 -

(probably no coincidence that scholars believe this was an earliest Christian hymns):

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things were created through him and for him.

He is the firstborn, the “Alpha,” of all creation.

Everything that we see was created *through* him.

Sometimes we’re tempted to believe that Jesus doesn’t come into play until the book of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - with Mary Joseph, shepherds, swaddling cloths, and a manger.

But this hymn reminds us - Jesus was there in the very beginning and creation flowed outward from him.

He is the Alpha - the very womb of all creation.

But he is also the “Omega”

When we get to the end of the story, we find that it is not that different from the beginning.

In the beginning, God created humanity and walked with them in the garden.

In the end, God will establish a new city, the New Jerusalem - and Revelation 21:22 says this: “And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.”

The fulfillment of all creation is face-to-face dwelling with the God who birthed it all.

And there’s a picture of Christ, the bridegroom, wed to his bride the church.

This is the consummation of all history.

This is the Omega.

This week I had a very profound experience that I believe gave me insight into this scripture.

I found out that there are a couple of labyrinths in our local area - one in Fairview in fact.

What is a Labyrinth?

Well, it looks something like this (picture)

Some confuse it with a maze.

One main difference - there is only one way in and one way out
(you can’t get lost in a labyrinth)

Once you get to the center, you have to turn around and walk out the same way that you came in.

The point of walking a labyrinth is that of spiritual attentiveness

The walking gives you an opportunity to meditate and travel inward as you walk inward towards the center of the labyrinth.

It is not necessarily a “Christian” practice for it predates Christianity, though it has been used by Christians for at least a thousand years.

All that to say that I went and walked the labyrinth this week while preparing the message.

I took my Bible and prayerfully walked to the center of the labyrinth, where I sat and meditated on the scripture passage.

And I walked out, it occurred to me that the labyrinth was a good illustration of Jesus’ saying.
The beginning of your journey and the end of your journey are the same place.
Walking the labyrinth always comes full circle.

I Am Alpha and Omega - I am the beginning and end
The beginning and the end are the same place.

“In the end, all things flow into one..”

Which brings us back to poetry once again.

But it’s deeper than that.

Did you catch the poem in the reading?

To him who loved us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

You gotta love those passages that tell the whole gospel story in just a few short verses.

“To him who loved us..”

We were created for love - to love and to be loved

This is a basic human need.

God saw that it was not good for man to be alone, so God created a companion

But it goes deeper than that.

God exists in community - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God created us in God’s image - made for community, relationship, and love

One of the greatest needs we have in life is to be loved.

Many, many studies have shown that infants need touch and love to thrive.

Without it, links have been made to poor health, violent behavior, self-esteem issues, depression, anxiety and on and on.

Some studies have even shown that without physical touch, the brain begins to deteriorate.

This says to me - We are hard-wired for love.

“I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end” Jesus says.

I am the first love.

All human love is but a reflection of the love that is God

What does it say in 1 John 4:19? “We love because God first loved us.”

God doesn't love, God is love

Love is not something God does - it's who God is.

Love is not a *part* of who God is, it is the very essence of God's character.

God is the Alpha-love - and God so loved the world that he gave us Jesus.

But God is the Omega-love as well.

Looking back at 1 John 4:

“God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgement, because as he is, so we are in this world.”

(1 John 4:16b-17, NRSV)

The end of the story is this - love is perfected in us as find ourselves completely baptized, completely immersed in God - abiding in God and God abiding in us.

“There is no temple in the city, for God has made his dwelling with men.”

“I Am the Alpha and Omega - love,” Jesus is saying.

“To him who loves us . . . and freed us” the passage says

I think of the first freedom, expressed to Adam and Eve in the garden.

God didn't create robots that had to obey the commands of the master.

God created humanity with the freedom to choose love,
to choose obedience,
to choose to worship.

And we chose rebellion.
and sin became a ball and chain around our ankle

It became a yoke upon our back,
It became a noose around our neck -
choking off the very life that God had given us

And God was the first sacrifice - "he sacrificed an animal that Adam and Eve might have clothing to cover their nakedness."

And God is the last sacrifice.
Jesus Christ came into the world a man.
Lived a perfect life.
Gave his life as a sacrificial death.
Was buried in a tomb.
Rose three days later.
And has ascended to sit on the throne.

And through the death/resurrection/ascension of Jesus Christ, God says to us all - "You are no longer slaves to sin. You are free."

"I am the Alpha and the Omega"
The first freedom and the last.

And finally, this hymn says, "he made us into a kingdom of priests"
He formed us into a community.

As we've said, he is the alpha-community - God = Father, Son, Holy Spirit

But not just a community, but a "community of priests."

What was the role of the priest?
To be a mediator for God with the people.

The priest would enter into the Holy place, into the presence of God as a representative of the people of Israel

The priest would offer the sacrifices on behalf of the people,
Would speak on behalf of God to the people.

The priest was in charge of keeping up the temple.

"But do you not know," the Apostle Paul asks in 1 Corinthians, "that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?"

Don't you know that you are the temple?

That those who have surrendered their life to Christ have the presence of
God as close to you as the breath you breathe?

He has made us a kingdom of priests.

We mediate the presence of God to one another.

Do you see the richness of this image?

The Bible teaches that we do not most clearly experience God in isolation, but in community.

To get close to God, we don't have to go meditate in the forest (though you could).

This text suggests that we rub shoulders with God as we rub shoulders with one another.

Your calling is to mediate - to be the presence of Christ to me.

My calling is to be the presence of Christ to you.

As we serve one another, we experience God's presence.

As we love one another, we experience God's love.

As we forgive one another, we experience Christ's forgiveness.

As we celebrate with one another, we experience God's joy.

As we grieve with one another, we experience God's grief.

He has made us a kingdom of priests.

And at the consummation of time, there will be no need for priests, no need for anyone to mediate the presence of Christ, for God will make his home among his people.

There will be no priests because there will be no temple.

He is the Alpha and Omega Community.

One final thing: in Revelation 21 & 22, Jesus echoes this claim to be the Alpha and Omega.

Revelation 21:6

Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment."

To the thirsty...

What are you thirsty for this morning?

Are you thirsty for the deep well of the water of life?

Or are you thirsty for the shallow brook of sin?

(sure the shallow stream will satisfy for a moment, then it's gone - but the deep well of life that Jesus offers will never run dry and as he told the Samaritan woman at the well, "if you drink of this water, you will never thirst again.)

What are you thirsty for this morning?

Are you thirsty for love? He is the Alpha and the Omega.

Are you thirsty for freedom? He is the beginning and the end.

Are you thirsty for community? He is the first and the last.

It seems only fitting to end with where we began - with the poetic.

For life is a journey...and as T.S. Elliott put it,

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, unremembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple-tree
Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.
Quick now, here, now, always—
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)
And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.*

T.S. Elliott