

Opportunity to both “Be” and “Do” in the New Year

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It's that time of year again. An opportunity to start over. New Year's resolutions express our hope for something new and better, as we wonder, “Who can I be,” and, “What can I do?”

Revelation 21 records the ultimate start over. John's vision describes a New Jerusalem: No more suffering! All that robs life of flourish, hope, and fulfillment, is absent in God's commonwealth. All brokenness is gone. There is only love and joy.

The New Jerusalem descends from heaven to earth in the past, present, and future. God's holy city is always in a steady process of descending, never fully descended. Maybe heaven, God's commonwealth, is not remote. Not merely what we wait for, but what we have begun to experience now. Elizabeth Barrett Browning writes, “Earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God. But only he who sees takes off his shoes. The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.” If only we had eyes to see and ears to hear!

For John, God's commonwealth is the New Jerusalem, a city. In cities, people live not in isolation, but in community. An active community, where being and doing are related, and people are engaged. Regarding what missionaries do while overseas, one of my pastor friends said Frank Sinatra had it right: “Do-be-do-be-do!” God's commonwealth is not an eternal “Rest in Peace.”

Who can we “be,” you might ask? People who trust in God's love. Two things are involved in that love. In his letter to the *Romans*, chapter 3, Paul first tells us that though all fall short of perfection, God's love and forgiveness truly are unconditional, and cannot

be earned. And secondly, that God's love and forgiveness are unfathomably all-inclusive, including both Gentile and Jew, that is, all of humanity! Perhaps you and I have trouble accepting this depth and scope of love because we are not *yet* capable of such love. But God's unconditional, all-inclusive love includes even you and me, despite all our flaws, giving us the joy, strength, and resolve to actively participate in God's commonwealth.

What can we "do," you might ask? We can reach outside ourselves and participate in the ushering-in of God's New Jerusalem. We can do this because, "God will dwell with them as their God," *Revelation 21*. We are the living "tabernacles," tents, in which God's Spirit dwells. And that Spirit is powerful and active.

In *Matthew 25*, Jesus inspires us to action in God's new creation. Jesus tells those with eyes to see and ears to hear that we see and hear God in the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and those in prison. As living tents of God's Spirit, we are called to comfort these children of God with more than just presence and words. The writer of *James* is explicit: "If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm and eat your fill,' and yet you do not supply them their bodily needs, what is the good of that?"

Teresa of Avila, from 500 years ago, reminds us Jesus died and went to heaven, and his body is at the right hand of God. He no longer has a body here on earth, no-body except for us. We are now Jesus' eyes and ears with which he perceives the world's suffering. We are now his hands and feet with which he relieves that suffering.

Wishing for you that 2008 will be a year of *both* "being" *and* "doing!"

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