Sermon Revelation 1:4-8 – 21/11/21

Sermon Video link: <https://youtu.be/XIyB5FLQpEg>

For almost two years the world has been living with the uncertainty and in many countries the devastating reality of the COVID pandemic. Here in SA have been affected by this pandemic but we have at least had the comfort of knowing that for much of the time we have virtually eliminated the virus in our state. In the coming days we are heading into new uncertain and for some people frightening territory, as we open our state to the rest of the country and for the first time face the prospect of living with the virus circulating in our community.

The pandemic is not the only uncertainty we live with. This world and our lives are full of uncertainties and challenges, therefore we need to be reminded often of the most important truths. The ones that are revealed only through God’s Word. The truths that can give us strength and comfort in any storm.

In the early years of the church there were seven churches in Asia Minor (part of modern-day Turkey) who were living in a world hostile to Christianity. A world where there was no democracy, only authoritarian rule by an emperor. The emperor or Caesar regarded himself as a God, the Lord of Lord’s, and persecuted anyone who did not give him devoted allegiance and worship him. Christians who insisted on worshipping exclusively the Triune God, found themselves marginalised, persecuted and even executed for refusing to bow to Caesar.

It must have been hard to hold onto faith in God, for the Christians in the seven churches. Christians who were constantly under pressure from a society that did not believe in their God and did not believe in their morals. It must have been hard being ridiculed by their neighbours for following a man who had been crucified as a criminal and ridiculed for believing that this man is God in human flesh and rose from the dead. It must have been hard to face regular persecutions and to have leaders like Paul and John arrested. It must have been hard for John living in exile on the island of Patmos.

Sometimes it is hard to see God at work in the world. Sometimes it is hard to believe that God is in control and that he has already won the victory over sin, death, and the devil. Sometimes the troubles that surround us can seem overwhelming and it is hard to trust in a God who at times seems to be invisible and impotent.

John, while in exile on the island of Patmos received a revelation to give the people in the seven churches hope in uncertain, challenging, and fearful times.

The revelation John received from God was a gift to the seven churches to reveal to them what was happening behind the scenes. To show them that even though it looked like Caesar was in control and would eventually destroy the church, the reality was very different. God was in control, and everything was unfolding exactly as God had planned. This revelation is also a gift to us whenever we face the uncertainties of this life and the difficulty of living in a world where our faith and our Christian ethics are continually being challenged.

As John begins his letter to the churches, in his greeting, he reminds them of some important truths. The everyday experience of God’s people is that Caesar is in control and Caesar is the one true Lord of their lives. John reminds them that all is not what it seems, because God “is, and was, and is to come”. God is “the Alpha and the Omega”. God is “the Almighty”. John reminds us that even though it looks like the world is controlled by the rich and those with political power, the truth is that Jesus is in ultimate control. Jesus is the king of kings. Jesus is Lord over all.

The great news is that we also know what God is really like. God is not a despot who expects us to blindly do everything he says. God is not a disinterested observer who watches us from a distance as we struggle to survive. God is in control and God has a plan for us human beings. God wants to have a loving relationship with us, and God wants to have a positive impact on our lives, filling our lives with grace and peace. That means when life seems to be going particularly badly and when the future looks frightening, behind the scenes is our almighty, all powerful, eternal God bringing us grace and peace, amid our troubles.

We know this through the witness of Jesus Christ who faithfully proved to us by his life and death that God loves us. Giving up his life for us even while were still God’s enemies. We know this through the Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, showing us that sin and death have been defeated once and for all. We know this through the blood of Christ shed for us on the cross so that we may be freed from our sins. That means no matter what happens to us, even death itself will not win, instead grace and peace will win.

Therefore, instead of letting ourselves become overwhelmed by the troubles of this world. Instead of being anxious and fearful, we can be who God has called and created us to be.

God has given us a role and an identity. We are his adopted children, and we are priests, called to pray for the world and to bring the good news of God’s love and grace as revealed in Christ to the world. We are not only priests, but we are also a kingdom and that means we have power, power that comes from Jesus our king who himself is the ruler of the kings of the earth.

The power we have is not the power to lord it over other people but the power to bring grace and peace to this world by being like our Lord Jesus and living lives shaped by the king of grace and peace. Making a meaningful difference to the lives of the people we touch by the way we act and speak. Being the bearers of love and forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration. Being peacemakers in our relationships and bringing the good news of Jesus Christ into people’s lives in our actions, and when we are given the opportunity telling others the reason for our hope.

**Amen.**

**Pastor Rolf Lungwitz**