

**TEXT: Revelation 1:4b-8**

**TOPIC: John, who's been exiled on Patmos, describes a heavenly view not limited to seven but all churches.**

**SUBJECT: Revelation is an invitation to followers to follow Christ into a much bigger picture.**

**TITLE: The Bigger Picture**

One of the most amazing trips of my life was when I was privileged to go to Liberia, Africa, in 2011. I remember many details about the trip, but I've forgotten, what nickname I was given by my Liberian cohort.

On our last night there, our Liberian cohort gave each of their American cohort t-shirts, and a meaningful nickname. I still have my t-shirt but I cannot remember my nickname. What I remember about it, however, was what it stood for.

My nickname meant that my Liberian cohort felt I had the capacity to see a bigger picture. I don't know if that's the case or not, and I'll leave that to others to decide.

John of Patmos, who wrote Revelation, however, is one such person God inspired to see the bigger picture, and seeing the bigger picture resulted in John's witness, which is the last book in the Christian bible. John's writing is a clear expression of resistance to empire, not just by the seven churches he references, but it is intended as an instrument for all churches for all time to resist empire.

When Revelation was written, the Roman Empire emphasized qualities like "pax Romana" – Roman peace – as a means to oppress the majority of the population. That oppression resulted in a form of slavery to empire that often came at a price to the most vulnerable. Pax Romana made sure those Jesus called "the least of these" stayed in their place, and if they didn't, the ultimate price was crucifixion.

What John emphasizes in today's reading is how God is God of the past, present and future. The present reality is that God loves us and that love is expressed in Jesus' life, death,

and resurrection but since God sees the bigger picture, God knows more about us than we know about ourselves. God's past, present and future reality – an adventure of love – is what makes it possible for people to get through the best of times and the worst of times.

When I have had confirmation classes, one of the things I dearly love doing is taking the class on a trip to Kansas City. The trip immerses confirmation students and parents in a culture that is totally different from what they're used to, kinda like Haiti and Liberia were for me.

On the last trip I took with a confirmation class, we went to a homeless shelter in the late afternoon and into the early evening, where homeless people would sleep for the night. The shelter accommodated both men and women. The men slept in one area and the women in another.

As it got time to leave, I had to find my students and Christian Ed director. They were down the hallway where the women slept, visiting with a lady we'd visited with before we went into the building. She was sharing how distraught she was being homeless, and how she missed her children, but she felt that she would never be enough for God to love given her history.

As my Christian Ed director and the confirmation students listened, I asked if I could sit in and take part in the conversation. I sensed that they didn't know what to do with this poor woman. When she welcomed me to the conversation, I sat down and asked if I could ask her a few questions and she said yes. So, I asked, "Do you love your children?" Oh yes, she said. They are the most important people in the world to me.

That's awesome, I said, and I'm sure they love you, too, and I'm sure this is hard on them, too. So, do you know what the Bible says God is? She didn't. So, I told her, "God is love, and if God is love, Jesus says we are to love God and love others the way we love ourselves.

That also means God loves you and me, and her and her and her and him. So, here's another question: 'What would you do to help your daughters if there were no strings attached?'

I'd die for my girls, she said. They know that.

"That's right, and that's what God did for you and me and all people for all time. God's love is infinite and God's love for you is infinitely greater than the love you have for your girls, and that love is infinitely greater to an infinite power, and that's how much God loves you." At that point, she started crying. I don't know, but I couldn't help but wonder if maybe she didn't see things from a bigger point of view for the first time in her life that night. I hope and pray it was an "aha" moment for her to let God's light in her shine.

That's not the first time I've seen that happen, and God willing it won't be the last.

That's what John of Patmos is getting at. He's saying that in Christ, God is sharing a much bigger picture with the world, and God has a place for every one of us in the picture. In Christ, God is the alpha and the omega – the beginning, the middle, and the end – and God is inviting us to be part of that. To do so, means setting aside any of those traits of empire we may or may not realize inhibit us (and empire ALWAYS inhibits), so God's infinite love is an infinite love we have in our lives and share with others in every way possible.

In essence, I believe Revelation is about God's unveiling of the blessed community that people tend to keep themselves from seeing. God's unveiling of this blessed community brings about a completion, a wholeness, and a peace which passes understanding. God's unveiling of the blessed community is a place God wipes away every tear from our eyes, and God's children understand that God is their God and they are God's children – as it should be. The bigger picture is a picture where people see God in themselves, and people see God in each other. And

the bigger picture helps people recognize how they must take care of that image of God residing in every soul and in every part of creation.

This unveiling of the Pax Dei – God’s peace – directly shapes how we are and what we do. It looks far different than what we think it might look but it will always give us the chance to experience the adventure of love because love is God’s nature, and God loves each of us infinitely to the infinite power more than any of us is capable of comprehending and that infinite love to the infinite power is a love God has for everyone and everything God created.

God’s unveiling of the blessed community acts as an invitation to followers of Christ to serve the kin-dom that resides in every living being, even and especially when it takes people to the most life-changing places they’ll be. Infinite love kept to the infinite power has a way of doing that.

In the name of the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one God in perfect community. Amen.