Teaching Notes: Revelation Context

Revelation no ordinary book. Apocalypse=un-covering or unveiling

Opposite of ideology or propaganda which conceals and hides in order to oppress; Revelation reveals God’s participation in turbulent, violent, oppressive times to bring hope and liberation

Begins with John of Patmos, perhaps a bishop of small struggling faith communities in Asia Minor, now exiled to a tiny island in the Mediterranean. He writes truthful and encouraging letters to the 7 churches symbolized by the seven stars and seven candlesticks.

At center of Revelation is conflict between heaven and earth—not in the future and not apart from human history, but really embodies the prayer “on earth as it is in heaven”

Most clearly in Revelation 12 we see the central image and message of Revelation depicted in a portent in the sky: A woman in travail with stars around her head ready to give birth AND a great red dragon with multiple heads ready to devour her child at birth. What could be more symbolic of the precarious, violent world of end of the 1st century Christians.

The struggle is depicted throughout Revelation with various images and visions. Readers throughout the ages have misinterpreted these as signs of things to come rather than depictions in graphic pictures of what is already on one level happening.

Then over and over breaks in a bright and beautiful vision of heaven come to earth, like in today’s lesson when the New Jerusalem comes out of heaven to earth from God as a gift for those who struggle and suffer in life. This is the real message of Revelation: God is faithful. God is present. God is with us in all the complexity and pain of history.