

**A Sermon for 24th Sunday after Pentecost**

**November 3, 2024**



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**New Life Episcopal Church, Uniontown, OH**

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**[Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost – The Episcopal Church](#)**

## Revelation 21:1-6

### The Alpha and the Omega

In the reading from Revelation, we are invited to a beautiful poetic vision, a vision of pure loveliness, as the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. It is called a new heaven and a new earth, a still point that is both the beginning and the end. God says, I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.” Our Christian symbols sometimes show these two letters of the Greek alphabet intertwined: The Alpha, the first letter, looks like a big letter A. The Omega, the final letter, looks like a big arch, covering all that lies in between the beginning and the end. It is a symbol of timelessness. Time stops and is encompassed in stillness, the still point in the center of the turning world.

We have seen what our earth looks like from space, a beautiful blue and green orb, which we know rotates continually, and travels around the sun continually, in a never-ending orbit. From the outside of the earth, we can imagine that movement, never ending, continual, although we cannot feel it. But just imagine the very center of the earth, its axis, which does not turn. It is still, as the world turns around it: The still point in the center.

Let us imagine this still point as the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. It is not linear time; but time standing still. The beginning and the end are the same.

Do we need another picture? Another symbol? How about a Celtic knot. The strands of the knot are intertwined, never ending, as one end runs into another, a continuous pattern of interaction. It is movement, and it is stillness, at the same time. The stillness at the center of existence.

The Book of Revelation takes us to poetic places that are hard to define, and any attempt to make concrete images from the poetry always fails. We must simply go with the flow.

God tells us that God is the beginning and the end, that God will wipe every tear from our eyes, that death will be no more, that mourning and crying and pain will be no more.

God knows our joy and our sadness. God knows our mourning and our loss when we lose our loved one. The depth of our grief cannot be explained; we cannot draw a picture of it. It just IS. Before we lost our loved one, even if we knew that death was coming, we were perhaps anxious or fearful, and we knew it would be hard. But we don't really know – not until it happens and we are left with the void. Our loved one. Is. Not. Here. It is a shock. It is indescribable. We have lost our loved one from the stream of time that was so familiar – yesterday, today, tomorrow. Our loved one has stepped out of that continuum and has left us alone. Our loved one has escaped the

confines of the physical world and enters a new reality – a new heaven and a new earth.

In the beginning of the movie Shadowlands, the great Christian apologist and Oxford professor C.S. Lewis speaks somewhat pompously about death to an audience – perhaps as I am speaking to you now. Lewis speaks with surety, as if he really knows what he is talking about. But he really doesn't, because he has not yet experienced true grief. In the course of the movie, this confirmed bachelor marries an American woman named Joy, not for love, but to help her out with her visa problems. He does come to love her, and when disease takes its toll and takes her from him, he is surprised by the depth of his feeling. When he speaks again to an audience about death and grief, he is not so pompous, but rather humbled at the reality of her absence.

In our grief, we face a void and must come to terms with our own emptiness. As we grow to acceptance, we find comfort in imagining our loved one, freed from linear time. We think fondly of our loved one as having escaped our limitations and boundaries. Our loved one has entered the continuity of the beginning and the end, of the still point in the center of the turning world. Our loved one has moved into the closer presence of God, a place outside time and space, which we will not know until we too arrive there. It is beyond our comprehension.

And so we have poetry, we have prayer, we have memories, we have love, we have visions of eternity. God embraces us in our loss and holds us gently. God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

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I am grateful to T.S. Eliot for the image of the still point of the turning world. Four Quartets, Burnt Norton, II.