

The Missing Window
By Rev. Todd Farnsworth
Revelations 21: 1-6a



Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,”^[a] for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death^[b] or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

⁶ He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.

Todd: Today marks the 501st anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. It is a day when Christianity saw “a new heaven and a new earth” emerge in the form of Martin Luther’s 95 Theses condemning the practices and beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church as being antithetical to scripture. Luther was a primary force in the Reformation movement. He and Calvin wrote and spoke with a passion that moved their followers to denounce the necessity of a pope and, cash and carry salvation in the form of “indulgences.” We are blessed to have the two of them memorialized in stained glass up here

at the front of our church. Luther holding his theses and Calvin holding his Bible. It is a fine tribute to the beliefs of the Protestant movement and it...

Zwingli: Rubbish!

Todd: Excuse me?

Zwingli: Rubbish! Those windows are a profaning of what we stood for and, they are missing a much more important player in the movement.

Todd: I'm sorry, but I don't know what you're talking about or who you are.

Zwingli: Clearly. I am Ulrich Zwingli.

Todd: Who?

Zwingli: Ulrich Zwingli. I am the head of the Reformed tradition within the Protestant church. That idiot Luther got a few things right, but on the most important matters he was a heretic!

Todd: Whoa, whoa, whoa. That's pretty charged language. You know we've just been through a tough week here when the volatile language of our leaders has lead to some very violent actions.

Zwingli: If you knew what I knew you'd speak with such passion, too.

Todd: Well...tell me what we're missing. I mean, we have these lovely windows up here.

Zwingli: An abomination! Haven't you read my teachings?

Todd: Errr, no.

Zwingli: Obviously. Here, have some Swiss Miss Cocoa while I try to educate you.

Todd: Swiss Miss?

Zwingli: I'm from Switzerland, you fool. Unlike that faker Calvin.

Todd: But I thought he was...

Zwingli: He LIVED in Switzerland. He was from France. I suppose just because you live in Briarcliff that makes you a New Yorker?

Todd: Well, no, but...

Zwingli: Quiet! (to congregation) The reason these windows are an abomination is because they go against the biblical teaching of making icons or figures that draw people's attention away from God. I taught that the Bible is the law of God and, to that point, a truly Christian community must follow the Bible as closely as possible. These windows you surround yourself with are not "close." They are a distraction. They should be removed or destroyed (as should all things which distract God's people from holy reflection).

Todd: Destroyed??? Now wait a minute. You don't really mean that...

Zwingli: Don't I? Have you ever been to the Cloisters? Have you seen the defaced sculptures that once drew people's gaze away from Jesus Christ with their beauty?

Todd: Yes. I presumed those were acts of war time violence.

Zwingli: Holy war time violence! I encouraged my followers to destroy those so called pieces of art for the spiritual health of God's people.

Todd: That's awful.

Zwingli: It allowed for people to be more in "awe" of our Creator. Those practices of the Roman Catholic Church took people's minds away from what Christ taught. The Bible does not condone the creation of religious imagery...and so I took action to correct that egregious mistake.

You're welcome.

Todd: But you destroyed beautiful works of art that celebrated the glory of God.

Zwingli: I suppose you think the pomp and circumstance of the Mass is also beautiful?

Todd: Well, no. I mean, it's not my thing. I prefer a simpler form of receiving Communion. But...

Zwingli: And you can thank me for that, too! I put forth the idea that local magistrates (or churches, as you might call them now) had the authority to practice the teachings of scripture as they saw fit. I thought it was important for lay people to be involved. Read the texts. Understand what they were reading or at least wrestle with that meaning. I approve of you dedicating a new Bible for your community today, and I see from this silly paper I picked up that you hold "Bible Study" here at this local magistrate.

Todd: We did and we do. But why do you call our bulletin "silly"?

Zwingli: Because it is not prescribed by scripture. Have you read Jesus talking about which order or how many lectionary readings to include in written form for worship to take place?

Todd: No but it helps us...

Zwingli: It is not *prescribed* by Jesus, therefore it is not necessary. It is a distraction.

Todd: Wait a minute. I don't teach the Bible as a prescription. I teach it as a "description" of how we *can* order our lives. Kind of like a guideline by which we can grow in our understanding of God's hopes and desires for us.

Zwingli: HERETIC! I cannot believe they let you lead in the name of Jesus.

Todd: Join the club.

Zwingli: You sound like that heretic from my day, Martin Luther. He believed that Jesus was present every time The Last Supper was received. He described his mystical understanding of an omnipresence of our Savior in the elements (although he was never very clear about how that happened!). Whereas I taught that the meal was a commemoration of Jesus sacrifices and time with his disciples. The bread and wine are purely symbolic elements that we use to remember that gift as Jesus prescribed it.

Todd: I wrestle with that understanding, too. For instance when Jesus says, "This is my body..."

Zwingli: You mean, "This *signifies* my body."

Todd: Well, no...I mean...maybe.

Zwingli: No maybe. "*Hoc est corpus meum*" "This. Signifies. My. Body."
That is the essence of my issue with Luther. He says "maybe" too much.
The Bible clearly prescribes the meaning.

Todd: Actually, in our Bible Study class we are learning that because of various translations, it is not always all that clear. We need to rely on the Holy Spirit to guide us to understanding. There is a lot to think about and discuss. We may even come to different conclusions based on our experience of Jesus, but that does not make us unacceptable to God.

Zwingli: Heresy!

Todd: Hold on. Isn't it possible for us to agree to disagree on this matter?

Zwingli: Absolutely not. Our practices may be different, but our thinking must be in sync with the Bible. As I treated Luther, so will I take my leave of you. Without handshake and without respect.

Todd: Can I keep the cocoa?

Zwingli: Go ahead. You've profaned it with your lips, anyways.

Todd: But how are we going to unite if we cannot celebrate common ground?

Zwingli: Have you had much luck with that? Philip of Hesse tried to get Luther and me together to work out this disagreement. The Marburg Colloquy of 1529. Look it up. Didn't end well despite a few commonalities.

Todd: I did look it up. I believe there were 15 common articles you agreed upon. And only one issue held you up.

Zwingli: We must strive for perfection...like in a good piece of Swiss cheese or a well crafted Swiss chocolate. There is no room for compromise.

Todd: I don't think I can agree with you on that one, Mr. Zwingli.

Zwingli: I didn't think you could. Heretic. I will take my leave of you and your doomed followers.

Todd: (goes to shake Z's hand, Z refuses and walks out) Have a nice day...

Here at BCC, the Protestant Reformation lacks a window to Ulrich Zwingli, even though he brought us the ideas of local congregational authority, and the concept of religious morality being integrated into public life. His ideas moved people to take action on their faith instead of being bystanders. It was a new thing. A revelation that lead God's people to think in new ways about our relationship with the Holy and one another. Unfortunately, his unyielding belief in a prescribed understanding of the Bible kept his message from being passed on in the ways that Luther's message made the rounds. And perhaps there is a lesson there for us today.

May we build the bridges and see more clearly than our spiritual forbearers did. May we recognize the truth that God is making all things new...still.

Through Jesus Christ. Amen.