

The first Republican debates were this week.
The first in what is sure to be, both in and across parties,
a long series of politicking, debating, some low-blows landed,
funds and hands raised high in accolade of this candidate or that
on the way to Election '08 as it is already being called.

And, no doubt, along the way,
many – Republicans and Democrats alike-
will claim they have the answers
to the troubled and chaotic nation and world that we live in.

Regardless of the answers and plans that politicians propose,
we will continue to try to make sense
of the broken and painful world that we live in.

Here and around the world,
people are living in harsh circumstances,
be it poverty or violence.

Here and around the world,
people feel the oppression of
tyrannical governments and power brokers.

Here and around the world,
the natural environment is devastated by
deforestation, carbon pollutants and
wasteful use of water, paper and soil.

We are people of faith living in a culture
hostile to many of the values we find in scripture.
A culture that values individual achievement,
independence and collection of wealth over
sharing our successes, resources, homes and our lives.

We are people trapped in unemployment,
a dead-end job or a job that is sucking
our energy and spirit through long hours,
contentious work environments and unrealistic expectations.

We are ragged people torn up and apart by

divorce, suicide, Alzheimer's disease, prejudice and mental illness.
Every day we wake to news of unspeakable violence.
Indeed, we live in a broken and painful world.
Where can we look for hope?

Instead of looking to pol. leaders for answers,
Xns trust in and look to God for signs of
God's promises being fulfilled.

Revelation has something to say directly to us
about these signs of hope.
Our text from Revelation proclaims
hope and encouragement for all of us struggling in this difficult world.

Revelation was written to a people whose world was falling apart.
They and their faith were tested,
battered around, persecuted and outlawed.
They felt powerless under
an oppressive Roman government.

Powerless to stop the suffering inflicted by the powerful.

Powerless to live out their faith in daily life.
Forced into silence
when their faith would have moved them to speak.
Marginalized economically, spiritually.

It is to these people, and to us,
as we struggle to live faithfully in the face of
oppression, institutional power, pain and suffering that John writes.

John proclaims a new heaven, a new earth, and a new Jerusalem.
God declares, "I am making all things new".

Are you ready to imagine a new reality?
Are you willing to dream of that day when
all tears will be wiped away?
Are you able to accept God's unseen forces are already at work in
the world to bring about a new heaven and a new earth?

John paints marvelous visions of God's presence and restoration, renewal of the earth.

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more."

Can you imagine a world where there will be no more chaos?
Can you imagine a renewal of our natural world?
An ecosystem in harmonious balance for all time?

These are visions of hope in a world
shocked by violence, rocked by earthquakes,
battered by hurricanes, flooded by melting ice bergs and glaciers.

Can you imagine a world where there will be no more troubled times,
no more monsters, no more tossing about – neither natural nor
human-made - in the fulfillment of God's kingdom?

These are visions of hope in the face of
ears turned deaf to the cries of the neglected.
These are words of strength to those who feel powerless
to stop the powerful that gobble up the energy,
time and resources of the oppressed.

Can you imagine a world where death will be no more?

John's people faced suffering and possibly death for their beliefs.
Though the beasts and dragons will
scour the earth looking for the faithful followers of Jesus,
the Lamb of God triumphant on the day of his resurrection
will be victorious for all time says John.
All will be measured by the criteria of
justice and the self-sacrificing love of our Savior.

Can you imagine a world without death on the hands of
unscrupulous governments, empires and institutions of our time?

Can you imagine a world without out mourning,
without crying and where pain is no more?
In God's kingdom our sorrows are turned to joy,

our pain is healed, and God wipes away our tears.

God's home is with human beings.
Biblical history proclaims this truth again and again.
God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden.
God accompanied the people of Israel through the wilderness.
God dwelt in the temple in Jerusalem.
God walked the earth in the person of Jesus Christ.
The Holy Spirit is the sign of God's presence in this time.

And, by the power of the Holy Spirit we
see glimpses of the Alpha and the Omega,
and the coming fulfillment of God's kingdom.

As the Wise Women of First Trinity sell Fair Trade Coffee
in pursuit of economic justice around the world
we glimpse God's kingdom.

In the support of one another through illness and grief,
we see God wiping away our tears.

As we incorporate we incorporate music, dance,
visual art and nature into our worship we
open ourselves to encounter the One who sits
on the throne and openly declares love for all of creation.

This is true, and it is also true that our reality right now is
in the midst of many broken, mourning, and
dying parts of God's creation.
But it will not always be like this.
God declares, "I am making all things new".

May we be renewed by these visions in our pursuit of justice,
restoration of our earth and our love of one another.

Amen.