

Feb 17 Vital Signs

context

The person who wrote the Revelation of John - Revelations - also wrote the Gospel of John. Maybe the writers name was John but most likely not. It was common practice in ancient times for people to take on the name of someone who was deceased, yet well respected among the community. Both of these books were named after Jesus' disciple, John.

The book of Revelation is a powerful document, written long ago to express a strong message. Many of us have heard about the apocalyptic, end of the world images & fear-filled stories. But was this the intention of the original writer? Over the centuries many people have tweaked, interpreted and emphasized certain parts - - - so much so that it's difficult "hear" the original text.

Donald Schmidt is in active ministry in BC, he prepared a bible study for his congregation in Kelowna. He came at the study from the "what did it mean for the first people to read the book? What does it mean for us today?"

At its root the story of the book of Revelation is one of a fractured and frightened community; part of a church which had no idea what the future might hold and were wondering if it was time to abandon their Christian beliefs.

listen Revelation 22:1-2

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations."

The main message here is one of reassurance. Despite the darkness in the world, God will never abandon the people and it is the presence of Jesus the Christ [usually referred to as "the lamb"] who will heal the earth and its peoples.

The book of Revelations was written for a people who lived in a desert area and spent much of their time seeking and carrying water. If we want water, we turn on the tap, it is very difficult for us to imagine what it's like living with a scarcity of water - not so for many people around the world.

The writer knows their audience and understands what they long for. Listen again Revelation 22:1-2

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gift of music

To help us reflect on that idea of – what do we long for – let us receive a gift of music.

'The Way through the Woods' by Steven Webb

<https://soundcloud.com/steven-webb-7/the-way-through-the-woods>

Sung by: Central Bucks High School-West Choir Conducted by: Joseph Ohrt

reflect

That ancient biblical writer knew what the community he was closest to was longing for – the water of life. Actual H₂O that quenches thirst and enables health and well-being. Water as a metaphor for the renewal of the spirit.

In Stevens' music and Kipling's poetry there is a longing for the healing power of nature, to renew the earth as a place of nurture for all creatures.

*Where badgers roll at ease,
there was once a road through the woods.*

What are you longing for? In these challenging times, I am longing for balance to be restored in the inter-connected web of life.

"High fa-looting" words! Perhaps at the basis of this longing, is that all of us - all creatures - need a safe home. Our indicator species today is the rabbit. Rabbits are this century's new climate migrants; they are on the move as the earth warms. They're native to all continents except Antarctica, found from the equator to the Arctic, and from sea level to the very top of the Himalayas.

Rabbits are also on the move in Richard Adams' novel *Watership Down*. This is a story of a small band of rabbits who leave their warren to find a safe home. Despite facing many challenges along the way, Hazel, Bigwig & Fiver put their longing for home into action. But not at the cost of their ideals of living peaceably with other creatures.

There is a point in the book where Hazel and his friends have found their new home but it is threatened by the leader of another warren - General Woundwort. Richard Adams writes -

"At that moment, in the sunset on *Watership Down*, there was offered to General Woundwort the opportunity to show whether he was really the leader of vision and genius which he believed himself to be, or whether he was no more than a tyrant with the courage and cunning of a pirate. For one beat of his pulse the lame rabbit Hazel's idea shone clearly before him. He grasped it and realized what it meant. The next, he had pushed it away ."

The rabbit Hazel longed to live cooperatively with other rabbits and even seagulls! The black-headed gull Kehaar is a great character in the book - voiced by Peter Capaldi in the Netflix production. Hazel saw possibilities even in the most difficult of situations. General Woundwort was driven by fear and hatred which fueled his violence.

Rabbits are not the only species on the move. Thousands of people from Central American, in wave after wave, are trudging to Mexico towards the US. They are fleeing gang violence & extreme poverty. But another crucial driving factor behind the migrant caravan is climate change. These people come from

Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. In the coming decades, climate change is likely to push millions more people north because they don't have anything to eat. Climate instability is radically changing food security.

Canan, is an indigenous Ch'orti' Maya, who abandoned his lands this year after repeated crop failures, which he attributed to drought and changing weather patterns. "It didn't rain this year. Last year it didn't rain," he said softly. "My maize field didn't produce a thing. There was no harvest."

Right now we are the ones who still have a safe place to call home - we are not being forced to move to try and stay alive. Are we going to be a Hazel or a General Woundwort? Are we going to look for possibilities - recognize that all creatures need a safe home with food & water - or are we going to build walls? Are we going to be champions of the revolution of possibility or the revolution of negation - questions that Bruce Mau asks in an article in the current edition of "The Walrus".

A revolution of possibility will include designers, programmers, artists, scientists, innovators, entrepreneurs and faith communities — all working together. Bruce says " nothing is more exciting than a world improving itself. All our daily lives can be smarter, lighter, greener, more equitable, more open and accessible, and more beautiful."

The revolution of negation is driven by superstition and fear. It is a different sort of cluster— ignorance, despair, greed, racism, and hatred. It is about shutting other people out and protecting only ourselves. In one version of events, we act collectively; in the other, we hoard our wealth and act alone.

Tom Rand in his book "Waking the Frog", looks at the how societal factors immobilize us in the fight against climate change and how we can overcome them. He is quick to point out the fact that "us and them doesn't work anymore—it's just us." We are all in climate change together and we need to work everyone - including fossil fuel companies - in order to create our new story.

Watch out for Tom as you watch this, Cape Farewell YouTube video. Cape Farewell was started in 2001 by artist David Buckland. It works with hundreds of artists, designers, film makers & writers around the globe - all of whom are informed by climate scientists, economists and social innovators to imagine a dynamic, sustainable and creative future. Cape Farewell is based in both London and Toronto.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qQgEkkffRE>

Let us get it right. Our longing for balance in creation is possible! An earth where the rivers flow with the water of life, bright as crystal: where there are enough trees for their leaves to capture carbon dioxide and breathe out life-giving oxygen. An earth where both people and rabbits find a home. Let us stand together and be God's holy ground.

**sing Soil of God MV174*