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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“AMEN, HALLELUJAH!”
Revelation 19:1-8

Last Sunday morning I went outside to get the paper from our front walk and found a dead rabbit. Its underside was ripped open from stem to stern. Its guts were spilling out. Its tail was severed from the body, but there was no blood on it (it looked like a cotton ball fresh out of the bag).

The entire carcass was there, except for part of a leg. Why the predator abandoned its prey, I do not know: maybe it was interrupted, or maybe it killed for pleasure.

I lifted the carcass into a large paper bag with a garden shovel. Then Beth carried it to the garbage can.

The LORD designed every part of the Creation to interact in mutually beneficial ways, but sin has corrupted the system so that it is necessary for some species to prey on others. Worse than that, some people act as predators, ruthlessly exploiting others for their own financial, emotional, or sexual gain. I hate predation!

God hates it more. He has promised that when {Rev 11:15} **“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ,”** {Is 11:6-7, 9}

**The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them.
The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,**

**and the lion will eat straw like the
ox....**

**They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain...**

After {Rev 21:2, 26} **“the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, [comes] down out of heaven from God,”** **“On no day will its gates ever be shut.”** There will be no need for security measures of any kind for all predation, animal and human, will have ended.

{Rev 19:4} **“Amen, Hallelujah!”**

Just when I think our human species has hit bottom, I find I am mistaken. There is always a fresh scandal, a new outrage, an innovative assault on human dignity.

It is not so much that we are worse than we used to be. We have been perpetrating immorality, injustice, and idolatry since early in Genesis.

Yet there is a cumulative effect. Imagine that every instance of human sin in thought, word and deed, is a separate piece of garbage.

The trash generated in 1 week by 1 person fits easily into 1 bin. But if the bin is not emptied it will soon overflow. And if the garbage truck never comes that small pile of rubbish will grow into a mountain.

Now what if it isn't just one man, one woman, or one family, but millions? What if the refuse builds up, not for months, but over the course of generations?

Now and then a notorious sinner will invent a new kind of waste to throw on the heap. But mostly the same age-old stuff: deceit, greed, envy, lust, wrath, hatred.

Regardless, the mountain keeps growing. It stands to reason that the filth and stench and putrefaction are more overwhelming in the 100th generation than in the 1st.

Of course, Holy God has not sat idly by. He has repeatedly intervened against the accumulation, most powerfully by sending his Son to live, die, and rise again. If we are alive in Jesus, our guilt is forgiven and sin no longer has power over us. We have been {1 Co 6:11} **“washed... sanctified [and] justified.”**

But many do not let God cart away their trash. They hoard it as though it were treasure. It keeps piling up around them, higher and higher, poisoning them and their loved ones and neighbors.

Even those of us who have received his grace sometimes forget to take out the garbage. We let it build up in our lives, until we finally can't stand the smell any longer and cast ourselves on Christ's mercy once again.

Don't you hate sin and what it does to us? I do!

God hates it more. He has promised that when {Rev 21:2, 27} **“the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, [comes] down out of heaven from God,” “Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.”** Sin will be no more.

{Rev 19:4} **“Amen, Hallelujah!”**

The summer of 1991 I was a student chaplain at MacNeal Hospital in Berwyn. The first night I was on-call

in the Emergency Department a woman came in trembling like a leaf and weeping hard. Her second husband was dead on arrival following a massive heart attack. Her first husband had died the same way, in the same place, 15 years earlier.

This woman's grief filled the private waiting room like a dark cloud. It was almost palpable. I said, “I am so sorry,” prayed a brief prayer, and sat with her until she was ready to go. I could do nothing more.

During my ER on-calls that summer I ministered to the families of 18 people who were either D.O.A. or died soon after they were brought in.

Since then, in my 18-year career as a pastor, I have officiated 90 funerals and attended dozens more. I have also experienced the passing of my grandparents and an uncle.

I have had a front-row seat for the devastation that death inflicts in various ways: the creeping decay of old age, the all-too rapid progress of terminal illnesses, and the shattering instant loss of accident and murder.

Yes, death often comes as a relief when it ends pointless pain or abject infirmity. Yet that pain and infirmity are frequently caused by the process of dying. The Grim Reaper grants relief to the ill, but only after victimizing them in the first place.

Yes, for those of us who trust Jesus death is the gateway to a far better life. However, this has never been the ideal: the Creator originally designed us to not to die at all. It is only because of sin that it works the way it does.

Yes, God is more than able to accomplish his redemptive purposes by means of physical death – above all, the voluntary crucifixion of his one and only Son, Jesus. But while that says a great deal about the Living God, it says little about Death itself.

As a violation of the Creator’s original design, Death is unnatural. As the ultimate consequence of sin, Death is an abomination. As the breaker of hearts and destroyer of communities, Death is a terrible enemy. I hate death!

God hates it more. He has promised that when the Risen Christ {1 Co 15:23; Rev 21:4; 1 Co 15:26} **“has put all his enemies under his feet” “he will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old of things [will have] passed away”** when **“death, “the last enemy”** is finally **“destroyed.”**

{Rev 19:4} **“Amen, Hallelujah!”**

If you are sick and tired of predation and you can’t wait for God to end it once and for all, say **“Amen, Hallelujah!”**

If you are sick and tired of sin and you can’t wait for God to end it once and for all, say **“Amen, Hallelujah!”**

If you are sick and tired of death and you can’t wait for God to end it once and for all, say **“Amen, Hallelujah!”**

God the Father Almighty will accomplish this by the **final judgment and expulsion** to Hell of all creatures which do not belong in his kingdom, and by the **transformation of his people in his presence.**

As for judgment, it sounds so harsh, so final, so *judgmental*, doesn’t it?! It is right up there with sexual ethics, death and Hell as one of the most awkward topics

to bring up with a stranger on the train or a casual acquaintance at a party.

Yet Revelation repeatedly makes it clear that judgment and expulsion are a critical mechanism by which the Holy God will set things right and vanquish predation, sin, and death.

■ Chapter 19:1-8 is a case-in-point. In verses 1-2 **“a great multitude in heaven [shouts]: Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”**

“The great prostitute” personifies the anti-God powers which are active in worldly systems of commerce, politics, and false religion. They entice people away from him, and from right economics, right politics, and right religion, into immorality, injustice, and idolatry.

■ Verse 3: **“And again they shouted: ‘Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.’”** And verse 6: **“Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns.”** The multitude sings praises because YHWH has decisively ended the predatory, sinful, death-dealing powers.

Holy God will destroy predation, sin, and death by judging and expelling all that have no place in his kingdom.

■ As for the transformation of his people, in Revelation 19:7-8 the great multitude shouts: **“Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the**

wedding of the Lamb has come,” – that is our spiritual and bodily union with Christ after his Second Coming – **“and his bride has made herself ready”** – God’s people have prepared for Jesus’ return by purifying themselves and doing the work of his kingdom – **“Fine linen, bright and clean was given her to wear. ’ (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)”** – We are, finally, completely transformed – all that is left is righteousness.

Every impulse of the predator within us will vanish. Every bit of the sinner in us will be purged. Every whiff of death in and around us will evaporate. As John writes elsewhere: {1 Jn 3:2} **“what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”**

Creator God will destroy predation, sin, and death by finally bringing to a completion the good work which he has begun in us.

How shall we live in light of this promise and hope?

First, we wage spiritual warfare against predation, sin, and death.

{Eph 6:12} **“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood.”** If you are a conservative, the Democrats and Socialists are not your enemies. If you are a liberal, the Republicans and Tea-Partiers are not your enemies.

Our Enemies are {Eph 6:12} **“the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”** Our Enemies are Satan and his demons, and the corrupt institutions that that promote immorality, injustice, and idolatry.

We wage war by doing justice, loving mercy, walking humbly with our God. We wage war by making

disciples and manifesting the kingdom of God among us. We wage war by making full use of {Eph 6: 14-18} **“the belt of truth...the breastplate of righteousness ... the [shoes of] readiness... the shield of faith...the helmet of salvation ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God,”** and fervent, persistent prayer.

Second, we seek personal sanctification.

It is the Holy Spirit who initiates, propels, and brings to a completion the good work of transforming us into the likeness of Jesus Christ. We ourselves cannot do it.

Yet, we have every opportunity and resource to *cooperate* with the Holy Spirit. We are commanded, able, and responsible {Php 2:12} **“to work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling.”**

We seek sanctification through: {Ro 12:1} dedication of our bodies to the Lord as living sacrifices; {Ro 12:2} the renewing of our minds; cultivation of spiritual disciplines (Bible study, prayer, worship, fellowship, and service); frequent confession of sin; and an active commitment to live as those who make peace, strive for righteousness, and nurture real life. In other words, we root out and destroy every stronghold of predation, sin, and death within ourselves.

By waging spiritual warfare and seeking sanctification, we can herald (perhaps even hasten) the day when God ends predation, sin, and death.

“Amen, Hallelujah!”