***Shared with Creation Justice Ministries for Earth Day Sunday 2020 by Kathy Smith, Executive Director, Baptist Creation Care Initiative. Direct questions to kasmith@baptistcci.org.***

**FINDING HOPE IN TIMES OF CRISIS**

*We are living in times of climate crisis that can be depressing and scary. The world’s most credible scientists, the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), have warned us in recent reports that the threat of catastrophic ecosystem and societal collapse is very real. If we continue with business and politics as usual, the planet will heat to catastrophic levels in the coming decades: waters will rise, coastlines will flood, the oceans will acidify, wildfires will rage, super storms will intensify, crops will fail, and the world as we know it will come to an end. Those of us who are most aware of how polluted and imbalanced the world has already become often have the most difficulty overcoming despair and finding hope.*

*And yet we are people who live on hope and act on hope, however improbable.*

*The author of the Book of Revelation was part of an early church suffering extreme persecution, and as such was painfully aware that the world was far away from God’s will. The Book of Revelation teaches us to hope, not in some easy transformation of the world as we know it, but in a new world that God will bring into being even if the world as we know it is destroyed.*

**A Long Journey to a New Earth**

In its first twenty of twenty-two chapters, the Book of Revelation tells of the persecution of the saints, the corruption of society by greed, and an apocalyptic level of societal and environmental breakdown, suffering, and destruction. For those of us who see impending societal and ecological doom on the horizon, the Book of Revelation teaches us to fold all of that into our process of finding hope and envisioning a better future; we do not need to sugar coat the pain, and the stories we tell can be as long as they need to be.

Only at the end of a twenty-chapter long journey of chaos and suffering does a new world emerge, a world restored to harmony with God and liberated from the suffering of sin.

**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. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,**

**“See, the home of God is among mortals.**

**God will dwell with them;**

**they will be God’s peoples,**

**and God will be with them;**

**God will wipe every tear from their eyes.**

**Death will be no more;**

**mourning and crying and pain will be no more,**

**for the first things have passed away.”**

**And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.”**

**(Revelation 21:1-5)**

**On Earth as in Heaven**

Often, these verses of the Book of Revelation are read at funerals and memorials, and received as visions of a heavenly hope beyond this life. However, the holy city described in the Book of Revelation is seen “coming down out of heaven from God” (Rev 21:10). As in the prayer of Jesus, the hope of this vision is for a world made new: “on Earth as it is in Heaven.”

**Living in Hope**

To have hope for the future in these times, hope that is true to the scientific facts, we may need to take a long view and imagine a new world that emerges out of the rubble of the old. Out of the rubble of a greed-based society that destroyed and degraded so much of life on Earth, we can hope for the growth of a love-based society that restores and protects life on Earth. We can hope for a newfound harmony between humanity, God, and the natural world. Already, in anticipation that God wills to create such a world, we can start living this way and do everything we can to limit global heating and prevent the worst case scenarios.

**From Competition to Cooperation**

Because the climate crisis is global in scope, like never before, humanity must collaborate to solve it. Literally, nations cannot afford to keep fighting each other as we have been, because the resources currently spent on weapons of war must now be spent on protecting life. As God said to Moses, “I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live.”

**A New World is Possible**

Humanity has seen no greater challenge, and no greater opportunity to renew our values. This may be our last chance to value life above money, and learn, as MLK taught us, that “all life is inter-related.” If humanity is to overcome this existential threat of climate catastrophe, it will be because we develop the moral capacity to not only survive but to thrive. Right now in the 21st century we have a calling to act on the values that will turn the pages of human history towards the 21st chapter of the Book of Revelation. We exist now on the brink of catastrophe, with a holy vision still in sight: a world where God is fully known, “on Earth as it is in Heaven.”