

Time Spirograph
22nd Sunday after Pentecost
All Saints Sunday
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Text: Revelation 7:9-17

I'm taking Hebrew at Western seminary. Hebrew is one of my favorite courses. I'm attracted not only by this language but also the theocentric views it carries. One of them that I've learned from my professor is the Hebrew view of time. Perhaps most of us see time as a straight line with the past, the present and the future, or a line with moments where significant events happen in our lives or in history. However, in Hebrew, time is more like a Spirograph. It's like an image with a center and numerous circles passing through the center.¹ Now I invite you to turn around to either the side walls or the back. Please look at the circular windows. The Spirograph image is very similar to these circles. There is a center in the middle, and other circles are either passing through or around the center. One of the perspectives behind this Spirograph is that God is the center and he is present to all the times, which also means all times are present to God.² And if time is not a line but a Spirograph, for us, the past and the future are not far away. All have become present to us before the center. And when we tell the stories about people in the past, they are living in our present. Last Sunday, Pastor Jill, in her preaching, mentioned that the Holy Spirit is not only speaking to people in the past but also to us today. It is so true in this Spirograph image that God is speaking to all generations because he only has present tense. And all are coming together to God in his presence.

¹ Travis West, *Biblical Hebrew: an Interactive Approach*, (Wilmore: GlossaHouse): 66.

² *Ibid.*, 69.

Because of this image, it is also easy to understand that Jesus lived, died and rose again not just for people at his time, but also for all people from all the times. It is Jesus Christ, the Lamb, the center of the image that makes his salvation available to all people. And it is because of this center that even death and life no longer separate us from those who have left us. It is also because of this center that locations will not separate us from those we love and those who love us. It is around this center that we, and all ancestors, and all future generations, come together and worship together in the presence of God.

Let me illustrate in another way. Hope Church has a history of more than 150 years. Every Sunday, we gather around this communion table to worship God as a community. From the Hebrew view of time, this community includes not just people in the present, as you can see, but also those in the past 150 years as well as those who will be part of our community in the future. In faith we are brought into the presence of Christ and also the presence of those who are sharing the faith with us.

In the book of revelation, John saw a vision that people from all nations and all languages, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands, were worshipping before Christ. There are also angels singing around the throne. Again, from the Hebrew perspective of time, we are brought into the vision of worship with all saints and angels before the throne. So, as we come to this communion table, to this water, we are joining them and worshipping God with them. We are entering a vision where there are no longer tears, suffering, brokenness, pain or injustice, but joy, peace, nourishment and protection. I can hardly imagine how beautiful it is! But this vision gives us the assurance of God's promise. This is a glimpse of the world renewed and restored. This is a taste of the feast in heaven.

In Revelation chapter 7, verse 13, one of the elders asked John, “Who are these people? Where have they come from?” Why did the elder ask John such a question?

The book of revelation is commonly considered to be written at a time when Christians were under persecution. God reveals such a vision so that the Christian community at that time might be comforted and strengthened in faith by these saints who are made pure in the blood of the Lamb and sharing the victory of Christ.

There are people, either in our individual lives or in this community, whose faithfulness and love in Christ have brought great encouragement to us. For me, my grandma is one of those whose love has comforted me, even though she lives far away in China. She sowed a seed of faith in my childhood even though I didn’t understand what God means. And also my friend Jim, the former manager of community kitchen, as I mentioned in my first sermon last year, who brought smiles to us. And my friend Mel, who showed hospitality to me with his wife. Although Jim and Mel have left me, their witnesses are still alive in me.

For many people in this community, Libby Hillegonds is one of the saints who have encouraged us and nourished us with her good fruit. We dedicated this Bible in memory of Libby so that whenever the Bible is read, we pray the Holy Spirit will bring the scriptures into life. There are so many living witnesses surrounding us to encourage us to run the race with endurance. With their encouragement, whatever difficulty we may face; whenever a storm is circling, or whenever pain engulfs, we are not alone. These witnesses remind us of the hope of God’s fulfillment and the assurance of God’s promise. Our longing for true love, true joy, true wholeness come into reality around the center of Jesus Christ.

Today is all saints' day. Let me invite you to honor all people who have been part of our community and whose faithful fruits have nurtured us. As we come to this communion table, we also come with all saints in the presence of Jesus Christ. As we hear in our liturgy whenever we celebrate the Lord's Supper: Since by his death, resurrection, and ascension, Christ has obtained for us the life-giving spirit who unites us all in one body, so are we to receive this Supper in true love, mindful of the communion of saints. As the water nourishes them, let it also be nourishing us and running through us into our families, neighbors, and even the nations. Let the love, joy and faith also bring us into the presence of all future generations. So we join with all God's people to say, "Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever!" Amen.