

**Dr. Charles Curley
State College Presbyterian Church
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**Neither Alpha Nor Omega:
Living in the Middle**

**Genesis 2:4-9
Revelation 21:1-7**

**“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.”
from Revelation 21:6**

Being unhappy in the middle is the chronic, everlasting condition of the human race.

Give us Alpha or Omega, Lord, the beginning or the end – but save us from the tedium of life in the middle!

From the Garden of Eden in Genesis to the Holy City seen of John in Revelation is to move from the Alpha to the Omega (or, if we use our alphabet--from the A to the Z).

And through most of the history of humankind we have yearned for the Alpha or the Omega.

Every day the news reminds us that visions of the beginning and the end, curiously similar to the Alpha and Omega of Genesis and Revelation are enacted all around us.

For we live in a world of reformers and revolutionaries (and always have).

We live in a world aware of the multiplicity of its faults and failures, yet a world which seems unable to deal creatively and successfully with its own problems.

I remember back during the Apollo 13, the space capsule which lost power on the way to the moon and was almost lost in space, during that crisis a commentator used the fragile, powerless, seemingly doomed state of Apollo 13 as a metaphor for the fragility of our life on earth.

He wrote:

"We on earth are ourselves a space ship hurtling through a void, running out of both water and air, and with no place to land. Who will save us and guide us in?"

Has the truth of that description of our earth changed significantly since it was written?

Do you know that was thirty nine years ago, in 1970!

Years of technological advance.

Years of computer and the internet.

Years of medical breakthroughs.

Years of war and rumor of war.

Years of genocide and starvation.

Years during which both Republican and Democrat had the chance to save us.

But did they?

Has the reality of spaceship earth changed in the last thirty-nine --- or fifty --- or five hundred years?

I think not.

The constant human question is:

“Who will save us and guide us home?”

As a political question, the answer has most often come from one of two extremes – from reformers or revolutionaries.

To use the Biblical vision, reformers are those who, bewailing our present condition, want to restore us to some vision of an almost primeval purity.

Those who would take us back – back to some vision of the Garden of Eden, before life became so corrupted.

Reformers Pied Pipers with the vision of the ultimate goodness of a garden. And want to save us all and lead us home to their vision – whether we want to be led or not.

On the other extreme are the visions of those we call revolutionaries, though anarchists might be a better word.

The political vision of revolutionaries through the ages is frighteningly similar to John’s in Revelation.

Despairing over our present condition, they would pull down the social order, purify society with blood and fire, and only then start over again.

Whether in 18th century France, early 20th century Russia, later 20th century Iran, or on the streets of Pittsburgh during the G-20 riots, there are those who believe we are so far gone, the only way to salvation is through destruction.

Our culture seems to be constantly rebounding between enacting Genesis and Revelation.

These mirror-echoes of Biblical themes bounce through our culture.

Politicians promise return to the Garden, where everyone is happy, and we can dance and play like children all the days of our lives.

Their plan, program, vision will save us.

"No," others cry, "We must destroy the old before the new can come about. God may be doing a new thing, but we are his helpers. First break down the old and then the new can come in."

Their bankruptcy of ideas came when they refused to recognize that they were living in the middle time.

For only God is Alpha and Omega.

We are all people of the middle.

People of the extremes thought they could remain pure while the world and culture round them was the bad guy.

The ideas were bankrupt, but credit must be given to them for at least trying.

"How will we be saved?" is really a theological question, no matter how much we seek political answers.

We know that we are neither at the beginning of time nor at the end. (For that matter, neither were either of the writers of Genesis or Revelation.)

We are in the Middle Time -- between the Alpha and the Omega -- between the beginning and the end.

The Biblical drama is very clear what happens in the middle time.

The Bible claims that God has a continuing lover's quarrel with the world, which has been going on since the Garden of Eden and its tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil

A lover's quarrel ever since Adam and Eve, the Snake and the Apple.

And it is still going on.

God has a lover's quarrel with **us**.

Failure and guilt, forgiveness and reconciliation are the makings of life lived in a lover's quarrel with God. They are the reality of life lived in the middle.

Perfect love may cast out fear, but on **earth there is no perfect love**.

No amount of knowledge, no amount of technology, no amount of political promises, no amount of policy changes will free us from this lover's quarrel.

For our love is not perfect, and our lives are not perfect – and our faith in God is no where even close to perfect.

This is the nature of God's lover's quarrel with us:

Start with this **fact**: God loves us.

Infinite and unending is the love of God.

We reject God -- and remember the Bible maintains that to reject **any** person is to reject God.

When we reject our lover, we separate ourselves from him.

Remember, our lover here is God, and we have a word for the separation that comes from that rejection – the word sin.

Sin separates us from God.

When we are separated from God, we eventually figure out that we are lost.

Being lost, we want to get back with our lover God, but something in us blocks us from grasping that to come back to God we must forgive and become at one with each other. We must even forgive ourselves.

And most times that is the hardest thing for us to do.

It is like a one/two punch that keeps us from our lover God.

First, we deny **we need** forgiveness, and therefore refuse to **forgive ourselves**.

Two, since we cannot forgive ourselves, we convince ourselves that God cannot possibly forgive us.

Yet love and forgiveness is exactly what God holds out to us.

Always.

Christianity makes the claim that to break through our stupidity (and is there ever anyone stupider than someone in the midst of a lover's quarrel?) – to break through our stupidity God sent Jesus, our Christ, so that in human form the nature of this forgiving, loving, reconciling God could be better understood.

Even for the densest of human beings – like us.

Let's try this one again.

No matter how much we yearn for perfection.

No matter how much we would love to leave our complex relationships and unsolvable problems behind and return to a glorious past, or bask in the vision of a pristine future (as in Genesis or Revelation) – neither Alpha nor Omega are available to us.

Only God is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

The rest of us live here in the middle.

Where most visions have come to a bad end.

So if the Garden is closed off from us, and the city of God is an unachievable dream, what are we to do?

Learn to live in the middle.

And living in the middle is really hard work.

Living in the middle means naming our own failures, and pointing at our own sins.

Living in the middle means asking for forgiveness, though we know in our hearts that God could never forgive such as us.

And then realizing that we are wrong.

That God yearns to patch up our lover's quarrel. That God **will** forgive us, no matter what we think.

Living in the middle is simply to know that we are all strangers on the earth. We are all on this spaceship together, with no way off. We are polluted and pollute through our willful ignorance and sinful self-interest, and we are redeemed through understanding, personal forgiveness and reconciliation.

The way we are to live in the middle is best shown by Jesus, who said, "Love one another."

"Love one another."

Those words encompass everything between the Alpha and the Omega.

And it all belongs to God.

Amen.