

Utter Transformation

Acts 11:1-18; Revelation 21:1-5a
Lewinsville Presbyterian Church
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God gets everything God wants.

That's my new favorite statement of faith. God gets everything God wants. The official seminary word for that is the 'sovereignty of God,' so that's the term that you use if you're talking about it on the floor of presbytery. But what that means is that God gets everything God wants. There will be utter transformation.

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It's the title of a book that my wife Laura's clergy group has been reading lately. The book was recommended by Jan Edmiston, the General Presbyter of Charlotte Presbytery and the spouse of Fred Lyon, former interim pastor here at Lewinsville. *God Gets Everything God Wants* is written by Rev. Dr. Katie Hays, pastor of Galileo Church in Fort Worth, Texas. The book is delightful, hilarious, comforting, challenging, deeply reassuring and endlessly unsettling. In all of that, the book reminds me a good bit of the Bible.

God gets everything God wants. There will be utter transformation. The Bible says this in a number of different ways. "Nothing will be impossible with God." That's the Gospel of Luke. "The grass withers, the flower fades, other things pass away, but the Word of the Lord stands forever." That's the prophet Isaiah. "Thus says the Lord, as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return until they have watered the earth, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it *shall succeed* in the thing for which I sent it." That's also Isaiah. "Not my will, but thy will be done." That's Matthew, Mark, and Luke. God gets everything God wants.

The testimony of Scripture, the witness of our mothers and fathers in the faith, is that God gets everything God wants. Now, a couple of quick caveats about that. God doesn't get everything *we* want, so we may argue with God a lot about that. And God can be unnervingly patient – too patient, we may think - about getting everything God wants, so we may argue with God about that. And the way God goes about getting everything God wants is with suffering love, rather than with coercive force, so we may disagree with God about that. But the testimony of our ancestors in the faith is that God gets everything God wants.

Revelation 21 shows us that that's how the whole story is going to wrap up. "I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he 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." Death, mourning, and pain are not what God wants. That's why they will be no more. Those who are causing these things to happen will be stopped. God gets everything God wants. There will be utter transformation.

And God does not wait until the end of time for renewal to happen. It happens all along the way. It doesn't happen completely, but it happens in ways that let you know that God is making it happen. Acts 10 and 11 are quickly becoming 2 of my favorite chapters in the Bible. These two chapters tell the story of how non-Jews like us became included in the covenant people of God. That's because God wants everyone to be included. God doesn't like it when people are left out.

In these two chapters, we get to witness utter transformation taking place. We get to witness, in very-close-to-real-time, a group of people, who were pretty sure they knew what God wanted, coming to realize that their understanding of God was way too small. At the beginning of chapter 11, we are told that the Very Religious People in Jerusalem got wind that the apostle Peter was eating with some Gentiles in the city of Joppa, so they summon him to Jerusalem for what might be called an "after-action accounting." The Very Religious People liked things the way they were, with 'those people' kept outside. But the way things were was not the way God wanted. And God gets everything God wants.

Now, notice that they're not upset about the fact that Peter was baptizing Gentiles; they're upset that he was eating and keeping table fellowship with them. It's as if they're saying to him, "You know we don't associate with people like that." And then Peter, bless his heart, Peter who could be so hard-headed at times, walks them through it, the text says, step by step. After he finishes, we get my favorite line in the whole story. The text says that "When they heard all of this, they were silenced." Imagine that. A group of religious leaders, silenced. When God gets what God wants, it'll do that. These religious leaders can feel the earth shifting right under their feet, as the Gentiles, the outsiders, the ones who are not like them, are brought inside, brought into the covenant family. Utter transformation. God gets everything God wants.

"The one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.'" The Spirit of God is making all things new, because that is what the Spirit of God does. And what we must understand is that God's newness-making did not stop with the early church. The Spirit of God is making all things new right now, as we speak. You and I are living through a time of massive turbulence. A time of breathtaking polarization. A time when meanness, injustice towards the poor, racial hostility, religious division, economic unfairness, these things are happening in heartbreaking ways. Our time is not for the faint of heart. But do not be mistaken, my friends. God gets everything God wants. "Mourning and crying and pain will be no more." In the

midst of all of the turbulence of our time, we are meant to see that God is planting the seeds of God's new world. Our world will experience utter transformation. That's what God does. God's beloved community – where injustice will be no more, where creation will be cared for, where oppression will cease, where there will be no more violence, where the least of these will have seats on the front row, where outsiders find a home, and where insiders share their space with everyone – God's beloved community is being built, right under our noses. And God is using you and me in the process. There will be utter transformation, because God gets everything God wants. To God and to God alone, be all the glory. Amen.