

On this day of the Christian year that we remember and give thanks for those who have died, it seems appropriate that we should hear God's word from the final pages of Scripture, and so our second reading comes from nearly the very end of Revelation, setting the Bible's final scene.

It immediately follows a lot of judgment and death, destruction and tears.
But it is not a funeral.

In the fresh wake of cosmic devastation, and now this morning in the midst of our sanctuary turned candlelit sepulcher full of memories and tears, the visionary John jars us with joy. *And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

Behind death, John sees not a funeral but a wedding.

John sees the marriage long rhapsodized in Scripture between God and God's people, who now are a holy city, beautiful as a bride on her wedding day.

We, living and dead, saints and sinners, the people of God, have a ring on our finger and the trustworthy promise of a faithful lover even after death has done us part.

With all the saints, we are on our way toward a wedding day when we come marching in down the aisle toward every dream come true.

Of course it will be perfect...our groom will make it so.

Not only will we be dressed in the white we don't really deserve to wear, but all the proper details will be just right.

We can only conclude and trust, then, that we will have something old, something new, something borrowed, and something blue.

The something old and the something new, in fact, are the same something, which is everything. *See, I am making all things new*, says the one seated on the throne, and it is great comfort that the one did not say *I am making all new things*, but rather *all things new*.

The word in Greek is *kainos*, not *neos*; it is not brand new, but re-newed--restored, renovated, made new again.

All the old treasures we love and the trash we don't are saved and transformed; nothing is lost. The new heaven and new earth and new Jerusalem and new everything are all the old beauties saved and polished and restored to luster and working order, which is indeed good news for our fallen saints and for the rest of us on our way to join them.

Even the corrupt kings of the earth, obliterated by God in chapter 17, bring their glory into the holy city in chapter 21; *all things* are made new.

We walk down the aisle with the dream in the heart of God, which is older than creation itself; and we who carry the dream and who are the dream will be as new as good and good as new.

And we will also be something borrowed.

When God first started out with us, it was in a garden that God had planted.

We left the garden and built cities.

We left the fields and came to Chicago; we moved as a people from agriculture to urban life, from cattle to commerce, from family farms to a global village.

The human story is that of movement from garden to city, and when God's long-awaited wedding day comes, God loves us as we are.
God borrows our idea and incorporates it into paradise; God perfects our invention, and plants the holy and magical trees not in an old garden but in a new city, with open gates and golden sidewalks and a look of impressed wonder even on Daniel Burnham's face.
Something old, everything new, something borrowed...but what will be blue?
It will not be the smiling eyes of Jesus; contrary to widespread cinematic belief and the expectations of many of Resurrection's saints, Christ is not Swedish.
I'm also pretty sure it won't be a Cubs world championship; our perfect forever with God, while likely far into the future, is still closer than that.
Our something blue will not be the sea, because the sea is no more.
The sea, of course, that ancient swirling death, is the great separator.
Biblically, the sea is the primal force of chaos and certain demise...it's why the stories of Noah and Jonah are so harrowing...and it is also the sea that separates John from his people as he languishes in exile on an island.
The sea, the great blue barrier between us, will be no more.
Neither will the blue come from our teardrops, which will all be wiped away, or from the corpses of our beloved, for death will be no more.
And the blue will not come from the heavens...because that's not where the wedding will be.
The new Jerusalem, the blessed bride, is leaving heaven behind.
The wedding will be here, on our blue planet.
God and the saints will come to make a home here, where we live, on our new earth.
Our something blue will be our beloved home, Saint Earth, that little blue ball hanging like in a tiny Christmas ornament in the vast beauty of space.
For all that we have done to rape and ravage her, she too will sparkle new and host the wedding that has been God's dream ever since she was imagined and fashioned and placed.
The "Left Behind" books have it backwards; heaven itself will be left behind for the splendors here, as God and all those we celebrate, all those we trust have died and gone to heaven, will come home and live here.
We know this because we see the first glimpse of it already:
Christ, the first fruits of those who have died, is himself all of heaven come to earth, is God making a home among us, is the foretaste of the feast to come not high atop some holy mountain but on the plain wooden table in the center of this earthly room.
Our stewardship of the here and now proclaims a reality and anticipates a promise even bigger and brighter than securing an Olympic bid.
Our little song of welcome and praise joins their unending hymn.
And on that blessed someday, oh how we will thrill to be in that number when the saints come marching in--here, marching their glory into our city.
In those scenes of familiar glory, when we sing with them the new, new song, we'll sing the old, old story, that we have loved so long.
Together and wondrously new, we'll sing old, old story of Jesus and his love.