

God's Comma

First Congregational Church, Branford
Revelation 1:8; February 3, 2019
Rev. Suzanne Personette

The Book of Revelation, or The Revelation to John is the final book of the New Testament, and of the bible. The book has to do with the revealing of divine mysteries.

Revelation 1:8:

'I am the Alpha and the Omega', says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

Twenty years ago when it appeared that I was never going to have a child, and I was devastated, a member of a church I was serving in Indianapolis as their settled pastor gave me a card that said, "Never place a period where God has placed a comma." Sure enough, a couple of years later God graced us with a comma, and we named him Abraham Rain Peterkin. He was born in Ft. Wayne, Indiana in an open adoption. We stay in contact with Abe's birthmother and see her from time to time. There are too many times to count in my life, just like yours, I'm sure, when it appeared that a period was going to be the end of the story, but wasn't.

FCCB took some faithful steps last week as the church approved the recommendations of the Discernment Team, so now there's a big comma next to your name! The church is moving forward in some areas, most of which will be implemented by lay leaders. The congregation will decide on and implement the church's mission project, so that'll be exciting. Perhaps we'll hold some discussion dinners as we settle on the right thing for the church. *No period next to your name, God is still speaking at FCCB!* There's also a big comma next to my name, as the search process will soon begin for a settled minister, a process that generally takes 12-18 months. And, personally, when I leave here, there's a comma in my life - I'll move on to the next thing God has for me. FCCB won't be a period for me! :)

And, basically, we should all just know that we're God's comma, right? Say, I'm God's comma... Amen. Don't forget that.

In 2004, many years after I received that card I mentioned, the United Church of Christ adopted the comma statement, *never place a period where God has placed a comma*. In 2009, at the denomination's General Synod, a national meeting that was held in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Ken and I were there, and

witnessed an electrifying sermon during opening worship by Rev. Otis Moss III, the Senior Pastor of Trinity UCC in Chicago, that had all 3,600 of us up on our feet hootin' and hollerin'. As you know, that doesn't much happen in the United Church of Christ!

There's no way I can do justice to the delivery of his sermon titled "God's Punctuation," but I'd like to bring just a little of the long oration he gave that June day, and supplement it with my own words.

Let's begin. Would you turn to your neighbor and say, *Neighbor, O Neighbor, do not get it twisted: I'm not a period: You are looking at a comma.* Turn to your other neighbor and say, *Only God - has the right - to write a period.*

The Book of Revelation was written in a time when Christians were being persecuted by Rome, and the author, John, encourages his readers to stand fast. *Yes, he says, things are bad and they will get worse, but Christ will triumph!* John turned his prison into a pulpit! He was broken, but not defeated. And, in that hell of a prison, he found the audacity to speak back to Rome, to change their grammar. They thought they could write a period upon God's people. But, **God** is the Alpha and the Omega.

Human beings have limited power. For instance, we can write certain punctuation - the question mark, the colon, the comma. The most powerful is the period. God writes the period.

We write a question mark when we don't know something. When every child is born, we should not put a period after their name. We should put a question mark. 73 million low-income children have others put a period after their name. Only God can write a period.

We write a colon, which is a dot with another dot right over it, to testify about God, what kind of God we serve. God is able, colon, to calm our raging seas. God is able, colon, to turn water into wine. God is able, colon, to be the doctor in the sick room, God is able, colon, to strengthen our heart, God is able, colon, to nurse our wound, God is able, colon, to bring us back from the brink. And, if God delivered us one time, he can do it 2 times. If God can do it 3 times, he can do it 4. If he can do it 4, he can do it 5. If he can do it 5, he can do it 6, if he can do it 7, he can do it 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 – let me know when I get to your number – 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, am I at your number, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30. Yes, use a colon when you talk about God.

Sometimes we need comma theology.

Moses understood comma theology. He had a stick, a brother - and a comma. Pharaoh thought he could write a period. "I am Pharaoh, and what I say goes - period." God says, "**I Am Alpha and Omega**" – and God sent plague upon plague. Pharaoh backed down. But, then he thought about it, and he said to Moses, "I am Pharaoh, you God-man. I have an army and I can do whatever I

want. I'll erase your comma and put a period on the Israelites." It looked like a period, didn't it? Until the *I Am Alpha and Omega* came along and turned the period of the Red Sea into a comma! When Pharaoh's Army chased them down – when they got right in the middle of the Red Sea, God said, "Period! "That's it. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending."

God is always placing a comma. When you think God is done, God sends someone else. Here we go - are you ready? This is good: If there had not been a Moses, comma, there would not have been a Joshua, comma, if there was no Joshua, there would be no Deborah, comma, if there was no Deborah, there would be no Samson, comma, if there was no Samson, there would be no Samuel, comma, if there was no Samuel, there would be no Saul, comma, if there was no Saul, there would be no David, comma, if there was no David, there would be no Solomon, comma, if there was no Solomon, there would be no Isaiah, comma, if there was no Isaiah, there would be no pre-announcement of Jesus, comma, if there was no pre-announcement of Jesus, you wouldn't know Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, comma, if there was no Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, you wouldn't know Jesus, comma, and if you didn't know Jesus, you wouldn't know about Calvary, comma, and if you didn't know about Calvary, there would be no resurrection, comma, if there was no resurrection, there would be no Pentecost, comma, if there was no Pentecost, Peter would have never preached, comma, if Peter would have never preached then Steven would never have been stoned. If Steven was never stoned, comma, then Paul would never have been converted, comma, if Paul was never converted, then there wouldn't be churches in Africa and Asia, comma, if there were no churches in Africa and Asia, then there'd be no St. Augustine, comma, if there was no St. Augustine, there'd be no St. Thomas Aquinas, comma, if there was no St. Thomas Aquinas, there'd be no Martin Luther, comma, if there was no Martin Luther, comma, there'd be no John Calvin, comma, if there was no John Calvin, there'd be no Reformation, comma, if there was no Reformation, there'd be no Protestant Movement, comma, if there was no Protestant Movement, there'd be no Reformation Movement in England, comma, if there was no Reformation Movement in England, there'd be no Plymouth Colony, comma, if there was no Plymouth Colony, then in 1931 the Congregational and Christian church would never get together, comma, if the Congregational and Christian church never got together, then in 1934 the Evangelical and Reformed church would never get together, comma, if the Evangelical and Reformed Church never got together, in 1957 there'd be no United Church of Christ, comma, and if there was no United Church of Christ, then your interim search committee would have never invited me to be your interim, and I would not be right here preaching to you!...

GOD is the only one who can write a period....

Lots of commas out there. (10:00a - there's even a comma after the last period in Revelation, because... God is still speaking! There is more truth and light to breath forth from God's Holy Word!)

Now, there are those who say that First Congregational has been through a hard time and hasn't recovered, and wonder if it ever will. I would say to those people – comma. Say it – COMMA! That's what I heard you say last week when you overwhelmingly approved those recommendations.

Before I bring this to a close, I want to say something else that's important - that the sexual abuse that has happened in the Catholic church is tragic. It's tragic when any clergy person sexually abuses a parishioner. Sexual abuse is tragic enough when it happens between loved ones, or a stranger. When one's pastor sexually abuses, one's religion gets entwined which makes it doubly tragic. But, even there, even there, it's not a period. Because God swoops in and heals what human beings do to one another. If you have been a victim of sexual abuse, or know someone who has been a victim of sexual abuse, your life is not a period. It's a comma. Resurrection is a comma away. [even a clergyperson abuser's life doesn't have to be a period, it can be a comma if they repent, seek forgiveness, and begin again]

Which brings us to the end, when death had the wrong kind of grammar at Calvary. When death tried to destroy Jesus, death thought that Jesus was a period. But early on Sunday morning, with all power in his hands, Jesus got up and said, "COMMA. I am the true vine, the bread of life, the way maker, heart fixer, comma, comma, comma."

There is one more punctuation. It's the exclamation point. If God has ever blessed you, if God has ever healed you, then you know what I'm talking about! Are you here?!

God will, yes he will. **God** will write a comma on your life. Amen.

