

“An Ending is Just the Sign of a New Beginning”

A sermon delivered by the Rev. Dr. Bill Steadman
at St. Andrew's United Church, Sudbury
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READINGS: Revelation 1:4b-8
John 18:33-37

We have heard the words many times: “I am the Alpha and the Omega – the beginning and the end.”

And we have found ways to make those letters – the “A” of the Greek alphabet, and the “Long O” in Greek, which comes at the end of that alphabet – significant symbols for life.

People with an “alpha” personality are those who are driven, eager to seek high pressured jobs or pressure-filled opportunities, or maybe they make whatever they do full of pressure, and the omega symbolizes the end, so also completion and fullness.

Omega is a popular symbol for science, used in a variety of ways within physics, statistics, and biology to name a few. Within sociology, the omega represents the least significant group in a society, whereas in theology the omega represents the end times or fulfillment of all that we seek. In resistance, the capital omega stands for “Ohm.”

The small omega is a symbol for a cat, as it looks like the way a cat's mouth is pursed with its connecting “u” shapes.

The Omega Point is a more recent term related to the letter “Omega” -- a belief that humans are evolving into a higher consciousness as the years go by. It is a concept credited to the French Jesuit Scholar

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin who speaks about the Omega Point in his book *The Phenomenon of Man*. We may question that progression today as we continue to hear horrors around the world. Our optimism for the future may be tempered from the world of 1955 in which Teilhard de Chardin wrote those hopeful words.

The very symbol of omega is like a horseshoe – the capital letter ‘omega’ is an open elliptical circle with tails coming out from the opening of the horseshoe. The symbol of alpha and omega (as in our church crest) is a way to communicate not just the beginning (alpha) and the end (Omega), but omega was known as the symbol of “the end of life and life beyond the end.”

We may have no direct or assured control as to how our lives begin or end. But we do have the opportunity to respond to those experiences in a way that never dismisses all that we face.

In the biblical record, talk of alpha and omega, beginning and end, is not so much an attempt to put into order our lives, but to remind us that we do have periodic moments when we begin something anew, or we face the end of something valued and enjoyed. Endings should not be seen as disappointments and sources of despair, but rather transition times that can lead to new beginnings.

Mary Jaksch has written a book entitled ***Start Over: Create the Life YOU Want.*** One of the stories that inspired her to write that book is the story of Kyrsten Bean. Three years ago at the age of 26 she was fired from her first publishing job. She and her husband were forced to move to a neighbouring town and live in her grandparents' house. She found it hard to get work, so she volunteered for some publications.

Eventually she was involved in putting together listings of businesses for publications that created phone books, and was asked to write some feature articles on certain companies. She was so successful she got more and more opportunities to write, and eventually developed a healthy free-lance writing business.

Now complicating all of this was the fact she suffered from back pain, and had become addicted to medications she had been prescribed to fight the pain. So awful was her experience that she took uppers and downers, pain pills for the pain and others to counteract the earlier medication.

Over a couple of years she reduced the medication, regained her ability to think and be creative, and adjusted to life without medication.

She has now developed a whole new way of being, and landed on her feet in a new writing career, because she allowed an ending to be only the initiation for a new beginning.

In his wide ranging commentary on the ***Book of Revelation***, Jacques Ellul, a noted lay theologian of the Reformed Church of France, sees in the alpha and the omega a sense of who God is for us, and what God represents.

God is not just the symbol of all of life, completeness, as in the Alpha and Omega, but God is a reminder that the source of new energy, new hope, new purpose also comes from God.

May Jaksch in another work has offered a series of attitudes and approaches that help us find the kind of meaningful life that is sought here in ***Revelation:***

1. *Find Your Significance*

Life is about doing that which brings meaning and significance to us. Whatever gives us a sense of value and meaning, do it!

2. *Choose wholeness over happiness.*

Happiness, she claims, is often what we get for ourselves, when others are meeting our needs and our desires; wholeness is what we can do in life for others that brings satisfaction and purpose to our lives. We all need that sense of purpose, of wholeness.

3. *Be intentional.*

Be thoughtful about what you do and why you do it. Do not be whimsical in doing that which is important, and know when to be serious and committed.

4. *Dare to take risks.*

She does not mean climb mountains or hang glide without a harness. She means to be able to think outside the box, and risk reaching out in ways that may not seem comfortable or normal, but can create real dialogue and important interaction.

Jesus said "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. May we see our endings as more transitions that can lead to new beginnings, and may we leave room for God to be part of all of those transitions and opportunities.