I was recently at an event that was of a Christian nature (how is that for being vague). At this event a number people from various denominational backgrounds spoke and for the most part they did a good job. What I mean by the term “good job” is that the talks were interesting and the speakers kept their thoughts within the bounds of things most Christians would agree with, i.e. there were no hopped up Lutherans calling the Pope the antichrist. However, in such situations there is always that guy. The one who either didn’t get the memo or is so convinced of their own infallibility that they will not go quietly into the goodnight. This speaker started with a fairly Baptist plug – salvation is wholly dependent on a person saying the sinner’s prayer. For those of you not familiar with the sinner’s prayer it is a popular prayer in Evangelical circles. Basically it has the person praying it confess that they are a sinner and that they desire to have a personal relationship with Jesus. Had he stopped there, it might have been okay, but he didn’t stop there. He decided he needed to provide an inventory of all the people who wouldn’t be saved. You would think that this list of the unsaved would be heavily comprised of devil worshippers and the production team that gave us the movie *Titanic*, but it didn’t. It was comprised mainly of Christians who did not subscribe to his particular understanding of Christianity. And he seemed most upset with those people who have liturgy. He said numerous times that “Your liturgy is not going to save you.” Now I do not want to get into an argument about whether straight flush of liturgies beats a full house of sinner’s prayers, rather I want to have a discussion about completeness and incompleteness. I want to ask whether one thing is enough be it liturgy, the sinner’s prayer or any other Christian practice? And to start this conversation let’s turn to the *Revelation of John*, which is back this week due to popular demand. The line I really want to focus on is the one that says, “And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See I am making all things new.’”

Now I assume you have no idea where I am going with this, but like Hegel’s view of history, I am pretty sure I have a destination. The verse is about the end of this world and the beginning of the new one. But notice how this new world happens. It is not a controlled demolition of the old with an introduction of the shiny and new. Rather it is a revitalizing of the old – all things are being made new. And the word “all” is the one I really want to focus on. God does not say he is going to make some things new but leave the Northwest Territories to fend for themselves. No rather everything is included in God’s plan. And if everything is included that means there is something redeemable about it. Or put another way there is nothing that is outside the purview of God’s plan. Which of course brings me back to the speaker who really didn’t like liturgy.

In his telling salvation happened in one realm and that realm was the mind. Once you made up your mind in the correct way then all of God’s goodies would be available to you. But if all things will be made new, can we be so exclusive in our relationship with God? Can we say we don’t need to bring all of ourselves to God, but rather just the thinking parts? I don’t think it is that easy. And the reason I don’t think it is so easy is because God is so complex and so beyond us that we need to bring everything we have to even begin to understand. Maybe this guy’s mind was a whole lot better than mine, but I often find in the times when I am supposed to be praying and contemplating my mind is busy doing other things. Things like remembering that time in ninth grade when Alex Majors thought Soviet was spelled with an ‘L” and wrote a ten-page report about the Solviet Union. Personally, I need more than just my mind, because it can be so unreliable.

I was reading an epidemiologist early on during the Covid outbreak talking about the best way to defend against it. He said what was really needed was a Swiss Cheese approach. What he meant by this was there was no one thing that would completely stop the spread because every mitigation effort was like a slice of Swiss Cheese. It blocked some stuff but had a lot of holes. However, the more mitigation efforts we had the better, because it is like lining up a bunch of slices of Swiss Cheese. With enough of them it starts to work – the holes start to get filled in. Similarly, I think we need something like this in our approach to God. If all we have is our mind, we will have something that has a lot of holes. That is why Episcopal services engage much more than the mind. Yes, we have a sermon, but we have more: we taste, we smell, we sing, we move. So much of what we do is not limited to us and our thoughts

At least since Rene Descartes announced, “I think therefore I am” Western Culture has come to see the brain and organized thought as the pinnacle of what we as humans can do. And sadly, nowhere has this idea been bought into more than in Christianity, especially on the Protestant side of the house. Here is what I mean by that in concrete terms: When the Protestant Reformation happened one of the architectural changes that went along with it was that ornamentation was removed and the pulpit became the focal point of the church. In practicality what this was announcing was that the engagement with the mind was all that mattered. You went to church to hear a sermon. If you go to many Protestant churches today you still see this. In fact, many in our day have much more in common with a movie theater than they do with a place like St. John Chrysostom. But our architecture tells a different story. Notice that I am tucked in the corner and the altar is the focal point. Notice the beauty in our stained glass and in the carved wood. It suggests that there is more to our relationship with God than me telling you some stuff.

But circling back to our lesson from The Revelation of John where we are told that God will make all things new, not just some things. When we forget that Christianity is about all of God’s creation, we start sounding more like an infomercial than Christ’s one holy catholic and apostolic church – don’t wait, if you say the sinner’s prayer now, we will throw in this free set of steak knives. Being a Christian is not about the one thing, it is about the many things. I most certainly believe that good preaching is important. Similarly, I also believe that confessing our sin is important and calling upon God for our salvation is important. But I also believe that good music is important and so is the Eucharist. When the Psalmist tells us to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, they are telling us that things that cannot be intellectually defined, like beauty, are important too. Can we draw closer to God by engaging our intellect, certainly we can, but it does not stop there. In case you haven’t noticed humans are very strange creatures, we respond to all sorts of stimulus that we do not quite understand. If I asked you what your favorite piece of music was you could tell me, but would probably struggle with telling me why. And God goes much beyond music. If we say God can be sufficiently tamed to fit within the confines of the sinner’s prayer, we are limiting God to our own mediocre intellect. The Church across time has embraced so many means by which to see God because God is that vast. Our worship of God should incorporate the “all things” we read about this morning so that we may be his, this day and forevermore.