

Easter 6C 2022 – New Jerusalem

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Acts 14:8-18, Psalm 67, Revelation 21:1–4, 22–22:5, John 14:21-29

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ overshadows all our reflections during Eastertide. It overshadows all our reflections throughout the year. Every Sunday is a celebration of Resurrection Day. Whether we consider our moral obligations, our high calling, or our life in community, we are always considering these in the light of the Risen Lord who dwells among us even now. While we don't see Him in the sense of looking at the person beside us, we do behold Him in the Word of God, the songs of God's people, and especially in the bread and the wine. He is present. He is addressing us. He is renewing us.

Today He speaks to us of our future and present hope. In Revelation, we hear about a new heaven and a new earth, a New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven as a bride adorned for her husband. A loud voice from the Throne proclaims, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."<sup>1</sup> Our future hope is dwelling with God and His people in the new heaven and new earth.

This vision of the first heaven and first earth passing away and being replaced by a new heaven and new earth can be a little troubling. We have no way of imagining it. Even the description of the New Jerusalem is difficult to imagine. When artists try to render this, they resort to all different images. Some have suggested the dimensions indicate the entire earth. What is the promise that our Risen Lord is communicating in this passage?

First and foremost, He is reminding us that our future is safe in Him. We will dwell with Him and in Him. This language used for dwelling refers to tents. I don't think this means that the New Jerusalem will be made up of tents. The language of tents should bring to mind the Ancient Hebrews, the Tabernacle, and the faithfulness of God to lead His people to the land of promise.

In the wilderness, the people of God dwelled in tents and God dwelled in their midst in a tent, that is the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was designed in such a way that it communicated a return to Eden when the priests stepped inside. When the High Priest stepped into the Holy of Holies, heaven and earth were no longer separate. The Tabernacle is an image of God dwelling among His people.

As the smoke from burnt offerings raised up in the air, the people could see it and rest assured that communion between heaven and earth was open. There would come a time when the Tabernacle was destroyed and later the Temple was destroyed. Burnt offerings ceased. The people were taken into exile. But God does not abandon them.

In the place of exile, Ezekiel sees a wheel within a wheel. Ezekiel who was trained to be a priest, sees the Shekinah glory of the Temple coming to Babylon. The Lord gives Ezekiel a vision of resurrection when he tells Ezekiel to prophesy over the dry bones. As these dry bones come back to life and become a living people, Ezekiel learns that the Lord will not forsake His people but will call them back to life. The Lord will raise up a new king who will fulfill the house of David. This king will be their prince forever. The Lord says,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Re 21:3.

<sup>26</sup> I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. <sup>27</sup> My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>2</sup>

As we read through Ezekiel, Zechariah, and other prophets, we begin to see images very similar to the images of the New Jerusalem. Image after image after image from the Old Testament appears here in Revelation 21 and 22. The King is on His throne. The Bride descends. The exile is ended. There is more than we can consider this morning, but if we reflect on a few of the descriptions we can see how John has extended the promises of ancient Israel to all God's people in Christ. But an even greater thing has happened. The curse of Eden is rolled back, and yet we don't simply return to a Garden. We dwell in a city.

This city has come from above. It is the fulfillment of our prayers, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." John characterizes the city as a bride, so this descent of the city is also a bridal procession where the people of God finally enter into the fulness of their Holy Communion in God.

Death has passed away. The old has passed way. In this New Jerusalem there is both continuity and discontinuity with our former lives. We see this from a different angle in 1 Corinthians 15. Where death is compared to sowing seeds. "What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in glory. "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven." <sup>3</sup> Think of a seed. It contains the promise of a plant, but it doesn't look like what it will become. There is continuity with the plant it will become, but at the same time the plant is so much more glorious than the seed.

Like a seed, we are planted in death. We follow Christ in death and resurrection. We are raised transformed. We are still the same people, but we have become what we were destined to become. The plague of sin and death and its effects on mind and body are forever removed. In Revelation, we learn that all creation is passing through a similar death and resurrection. All things are moving toward a transfigured glory.

The promises given to the seven churches at the start of Revelation are now fulfilled in Revelation 21 and 22. What we behold is the glory of God in all things. We behold a city of gold and precious gems. These images are reminiscent of Paul's language of gold and precious gems in 1 Corinthians 3. He writes, <sup>12</sup> Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— <sup>13</sup> each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. <sup>14</sup> If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. <sup>4</sup>

In the New Jerusalem, the wood, hay, and stubble has now passed away. These might be seen as our failures, our pain, our struggles, and the struggles of a world in the grip of sin and death. Now that pain, those failures, and all-pervading death is gone. In Christ, all things have become

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<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Eze 37:26–27.

<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:49.

<sup>4</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 3:12–15.

new. The Temple and Tabernacle are gone because all God's people dwelling equally in His Holy Presence.

One thing we may not notice initially, but this is a place of music. We've heard songs all through the book of Revelation. This is a place of angels and archangels and all the company of heaven singing. We also might consider the words of Zephaniah,

<sup>17</sup> The Lord your God is in your midst,  
a mighty one who will save;  
he will rejoice over you with gladness;  
he will quiet you by his love;  
he will exult over you with loud singing.<sup>5</sup>

The Lord and His people and His angels and all creation are singing songs of joy and love.

As we consider this glorious picture, we might come to realize that even now we participate in the New Jerusalem. We have not entered the fullness of the promise to come, but we rehearse as we gather, as we worship, as we sing, as we hear the Good News, and as we eat the Good News in the bread and wine. We are rehearsing the promises of God even now.

Like the seven churches in Revelation, we participate in and through the promises of God. He sends us out into a culture that is so often distracted by lesser truths or even false truths. We are sent out as Ambassadors from the New Jerusalem with the promises of our great God and King Jesus Christ our Lord.

May we go forth as His lovers in a world that needs to hear and see His Good News.

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<sup>5</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Zep 3:17.