

Sixth Sunday in Easter  
Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5, John 14:23-29  
May 1, 2016  
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I am not a big fan of the last book in the New Testament, but I certainly like the passage we heard read today from Revelation. In these last couple of chapters, the author finally starts to describe his vision of the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven. Twice he emphasizes that there is no need for sun or moon because God and the Lamb will be the sole source of light. This means no more night when most bad things take place and presumably no more shadows.

Barbara Morgan talked about our “shadow side” in Sunday school earlier today. Psychologist Carl Jung introduced the notion of the shadow to represent those unknown aspects of human personality. They are the interior or inferior parts of ourselves we don’t want to acknowledge – hurt feelings or negative experiences we choose to repress.

While exposing and accepting our shadow is part of the challenging work we should be doing on this side of the grave for emotional and physical health, perhaps we won’t be burdened in the least by a shadowy existence in the next life.

Without darkness and night, there won’t be any place to hide. Whether we like it or not, “...all hearts will be open, all desires known and from God no secrets will be hid...” All will be exposed to the perfect light of God’s love, which I believe we all ultimately want. Light is analogous to safety.

In addition to full light and total exposure, we are told that a crystal river of life is flowing down the middle of Main Street. Its source is the throne of God. It is pure and plentiful.

Thinking of the contaminated drinking water in Flint, Michigan, or the scarcity of any clean water in much of the third world, this vision of the New Jerusalem is not only uplifting but exhilarating.

At the time Revelation was written, some Christians were undergoing persecution for their new-found faith in Jesus. Professing Jesus as their Lord could mean torture, imminent death or both. With the vision of this New Jerusalem in mind without darkness, hunger or thirst, maybe one could bear the privations of arrest and execution. We know that some did.

Many scholars believe this “apocalyptic literature,” as it is called, was written precisely to strengthen and bolster believers during times of great trial and tribulation. Earlier Old Testament examples are found in the book of Daniel and some in the prophet Ezekiel, written during periods of Jewish persecution.

Such writings can still help us during times of personal or national difficulty when life takes a sudden downturn. *Yes, we will gather at the river, the beautiful, the beautiful river. Gather with the saints at the river that flows by the throne of God.*

Cathedrals especially, but even churches such as ours, were built with brilliant stained glass, vaulted ceilings and the grandeur of pipe organs to help us experience in part that future place of divine light and refreshment. I know that just being in this space is somewhat transcendent for me, and I hope this is true for you as well.

Jesus' disciples are not ready for visions of heaven yet, but they are perplexed and troubled to hear that Jesus will be leaving them. While they can't easily hear it or accept it, Jesus offers them several resources to help them manage without his physical presence.

First, he says that he and his Father will make their home with them. This is no small gift. In Revelation we heard that there would be no Temple in the New Jerusalem. God won't need a building to house and shield his glory from the people because we will be made pure even as He is pure. We might even say that the Father and the Son begin to make their home with us when we receive the Holy Spirit in baptism.

I haven't lived close to any of my family members since I joined the Episcopal Church. I have always had to travel long distances to see my mother or my siblings. You've heard me say before that the church has been my family far more than my blood relatives even though we are close.

St. Cyprian said hundreds of years ago, "Who has not the Church for mother can no longer have God for father." That may sound a bit severe and few churches can be that welcoming to everyone, but I think you get the idea. The Trinity wants to be at home and make a home in every community of believers. For this to happen, as I said last week, however, we have to keep Jesus' word to love one another as he loved us.

To help the disciples and us do that, he gives the Advocate, the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, God can pour love into our hearts as we prayed in the Collect. Our human love alone is insufficient. We need a torrent of love from the throne to fill us to bursting with love for others.

Finally, Jesus gives the disciples and us a peace that the world cannot give. The peace the world gives is based on many external conditions being held properly in place. The Pax Romana or peace of Rome that lasted a few hundred years was dependent on a domineering military and a subsequent harsh and swift punitive system of law and order.

Our own peace in this country may likewise rest upon our vast military strength and police force. Our personal peace may be the result of keeping a tight control over family life,

schedules, income and expenses and health outcomes. Most of us work pretty hard to maintain a tentative peace. That is not all bad.

The test comes when one piece of our fairly orchestrated lives slips or falters. Does our peace crumble and collapse completely, or are we resilient because our resources come from above? The peace that Jesus gives can withstand earthly tremors and storms because its foundation is not of this world.

I received a call from a member last week to let me know he had been diagnosed with a second cancer. He assured me that his faith would help him through it. It seems nearly all our members find great strength from God and our prayers in similar circumstances.

The peace that Jesus gives allows us to gladly participate in this never perfect world because we have and strive for a heavenly vision where all are loved, fed, clothed, healed, treated equally, and every thirst is quenched.

*As the hymn says, Soon we'll reach the shining river. Soon our pilgrimage will cease. Soon our happy hearts will quiver with the melody of peace. AMEN.*