



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

The Sixth Sunday of Easter – Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5

Focus: *The resurrected Christ – The promise of a Holy City*

word of life

“And in the spirit he (the angel) carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God....And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.” Revelation 21:10, 23-24 NRSV)

Read Revelation 21:10 and Revelation 21:22-Revelation 22:5.

CHRIST IS RISEN! CHRIST IS RISEN INDEED!

As the vision of John recorded in the book of Revelation nears the end, it reaches its climax with the vision of the holy city Jerusalem coming down from heaven. This imagery of a perfect Jerusalem coming from God is not new to Revelation. The prophet Isaiah, addressing a people in exile, envisioned a restored holy city with similar characteristics.

1. *Have someone read Isaiah 60:11 and Isaiah 60:19-20. What similarities do you see with our appointed reading for today from Revelation?*
2. *Is there an overarching theme in these passages (Isaiah and Revelation)? Explain.*

The readings speak of a city where there is no need for light from the sun or the moon (or torches, candles, streetlights, or any other human invention), for God will be their light, and darkness shall be no more (Revelation 21:23). It is a city where the gates are never closed (Revelation 21:25), where there is no fear of invaders and no incidents of violence (Revelation 21:27).

3. *Think of a contemporary city today. How would you describe it?*
4. *Can you imagine such a city as one described in Revelation?*

There are dramatic differences between the old Jerusalem and this new holy city described in Revelation. The old is holy because the temple is there. In the new, there is no temple at all: “I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.” (Revelation 21:22 NRSV) These names for God describe the God of the covenant (Yahweh – the Lord God) the God of creative power and might (the Almighty), and the crucified and risen Christ (the Lamb). There is no need in the city for a temple – a place where God dwells – because the city itself is in the full and endless glory of God.

The other dramatic difference is seen in the presence of a river – “the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city.” (Revelation 22:1 NRSV) A flowing, crystal-clear river would seem to be paradise to someone in an arid climate. The river is lined on both sides with the tree of life (echoes of the creation story in the garden of Eden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Genesis 2-3) which continually bears fruit (one for each month.) The leaves of the trees bring healing.

No more darkness. No more violence. No more thirst. No more hunger. No more disease. There is only God and an unending day of continual worship and praise.

5. *Can you think of something so beautiful that words cannot capture its beauty? How do we describe something that is beyond description?*
6. *How does the promise of a holy city impact our present lives?*

word among us

The elderly pastor had served his congregation and community faithfully for over 50 years. He had lived for as many years in the city and knew it well. He knew its history in the deep South – the divisions between black and white, the economic and social barriers that kept people apart. He had been instrumental in civil rights issues in the 1960's; and more recently, he had participated in dialogues on race relations and poverty. He knew the issues of the city. And so, he was asked to be the speaker at an interfaith gathering. He slowly walked to the podium, the frailty of his years evident in each labored step.

He began softly, his graveled voice but a whisper. "I know of a city," he said. And then, a bit louder, "I know of a city where there is no need for churches, because the whole city is a sanctuary, holy and righteous unto God. I know of a city with a river flowing through it – a river that doesn't separate people into black and white, rich or poor, north and south – a river which is lined with the tree life on **both** sides, and **both** sides are nourished with its fruit." His graveled voice grew in volume and cadence. "Someday you and I will dwell in that city. But we're in **this** city for now. And we are called as we live in this city to help people to know of that holy city and get a glimpse of it in what we say and do here in this, our city."

1. *Compare your community to the holy city described in the Book of Revelations?*
2. *How might we help others to know the promise of a holy city created by God?*

John's vision in Revelation of a holy city with no temple and with the river of life running through it attempts to put into words something which is beyond words. It is a vision which gives hope for the future, to be sure. But it also informs the present. We can face the challenges and issues of the day with hope. We may not know what the future holds, but we do know Who holds the future. And that makes all the difference.

3. *Reflect on the previous statement about the future. What difference does it make to know Who holds the future?*
4. *How does that statement impact what we say and do in the present?*

faith practice in daily life

Strive for justice and peace in all the earth

As followers of the risen Christ, we know how the story will end – not with death (which seems to be the final word) but with promised life in the fullness of God. We struggle at times, as finite human beings, to articulate in words what that promised life will be like. So we are called to live it. We strive for justice and peace so that all might know and experience the presence of God in their lives. We invest our time and energy addressing the needs of the city (and communities) in which we dwell, always with the vision of that holy city in our sight.

5. *Describe how you envision the holy city of God.*
6. *What do you hope you remember from this passage from Revelation?*

Prayer

O risen Christ, as we work in the city where you have called us, set our vision on your promise of a new, holy city where we will dwell with you in the full light of your love and grace. Amen

last word

Reflect this week
on the needs in your city (or your community)
and on ways to respond.