Sermon C Easter 6 2025\_SCED

Today’s sermon is less of a sermon and more of an invitation to you to enter with me into John, the writer of Revelation’s psychedelic experience. I almost want to suggest that you wear special glasses for the brightness: jasper, sapphire, gold, glass, agate, emerald, onyx, carnelian, chrysolite; jacinth and amethyst. The array of colours and tones is stunning with the city constructed of pure gold; and its walls and the very foundations of its walls composed of sparkling stones. John gives us the gift of a brilliant vision of how wonderful our existence will be as citizens of the New Jerusalem at the end of time when God is all in all. Let me unpack what John reveals:

* Note that the New Jerusalem comes down to us, we are not elevated or drawn upwards towards it. This emphasises God’s desire to be always present with and among us. A concern made known to us at first by the coming of Christ into our midst to bear our flesh and live a human life.
* Here the earthy incarnational principle is translated into a presence of splendour as the ordinary is transcended by splendid extraordinariness into eternity.
* God’s glory is revealed in the contours of this city which shines and glitters beyond our power to imagine.
* It is a place of architectural proportion and order with its evenly distributed gates around the walls, with the suggestion that nothing of chaos is present there.
* It is a safe haven with its high wall and its deep foundations.
* To those who are invited in, it is accessible through twelve gates. Here the number twelve suggests that these are gates for the holy people of God, and we are told that the names of the twelve tribes of Israel are in fact inscribed on the gates: a resonance with Israel’s story; while the twelve foundations are inscribed with the names of the apostles: a resonance with the Christian story.
* This city is the place for God’s holy people and we are included.
* The kings of the earth and the people of the nations of the earth bring into this place their own portion of glory. But it isn’t a ticket to get us in. It simply is, because glory calls to glory. And the people of the nations, and again that includes us, can’t help to bring with them the glory that God invested in every one of us at the beginning of time, so that we could return that investment to God at the end of time.
* One must imagine that the muddy boots, smudgy fingerprints as well as moral sin and defilement have all been removed, and the people who enter here are able to join without obstacle to bring the glory of their redeemed humanity to join with the eternal glory of God.
* This is all a place redolent with God’s gracious and generous providence .
	+ there will be life giving fruits that can be eaten directly from the tree of life, the tree that provides eternal life;
	+ and the leaves of the same tree are the guarantee of healing into eternity.
* Here we will see the lamb of God face to face.
* There will be no more night as the Lord God will be our light and the river of the water of life will flow through the city.

Now I invite you to take off those sunglasses. Consider now the devastated region of Gaza the war ravaged part of Palestine. Consider the blood-stained rubble where houses stood tall, communities flourished, people and families lived and worked.

What do we make of and how can we make sense in our theology, our belief system, of such divergent city images? It is almost obscene to imagine the glory of the New Jerusalem of the future against the background of this present-day catastrophe of war, violence, hate and pain.

Am I meant as a Christian person to pin my hope on the New Jerusalem, and try to ignore the other image, that keeps popping up on our television news programmes. Can we Christians ignore the suffering in this place which is, after all. fairly remote from us? This is one of the pitfalls of Christian eschatology: that’s material predicting the end of the age. It can make us complacent, secure in our promise of a magnificent New Jerusalem of the future so that we don’t feel the need to trouble ourselves about the real world, here and now.

Two things caught me up short in John’s description of the New Jerusalem: the first one was that human beings have glory that they can add to, join with, God’s glory. When we look across a devastated war zone landscape, there are no glints of carmelian or agate or emerald, only blood-stained stone. And we feel powerless to change that.

But the Christian promise is for peace, and maybe when we are able to make peace even in the mundane everyday of our lives, in the context of family or workplace that is when our human glory shines.

The second thing that caught my attention, was that the leaves of the tree of life make it possible for there to be the healing of the nations. And the image of this tree in the New Jerusalem is a settled image, not a tree that people grasp the leaves from to try to bring peace, but a tree that has already given healing, because everything is now reconciled.

Against the background of the violent and disordered world of ours, we Christians are challenged to find our vestige of glory to offer back to God so that it might join and magnify God’s glory. And what is more, because that glorious city is for everyone we are charged with the responsibility to help other people find their vestige of glory and to offer it back to God, too.

Our hope should not reside only in the expectation that we will reach the New Jerusalem eventually and transcend all our troubles in an instant; but also in the possibility that we will find a glint of amethyst here and a shard of gold there in our prayer, in our conversations, in our peace-making and reconciliation, and in our care for those who have not only lost hope in glory, but who have lost the power to begin to imagine any restoration of hope.

Loving and gracious God, Thank you for the vision of the New Jerusalem: for stirring our hope for the peace of the nations and of realising our God-given glory in your love. We pray for those whose lives are caught up in horror. May they catch a glimpse of hope, and receive all the help and assistance they need to retrieve their god-given glory and to ground it in renewed hope. Show us the power of love and equip us for the work of healing and reconciliation, In the name of the lamb, **Amen.**