

Come Lord Jesus

Revelation 22:12-21; John 17: 20-26

The 7th Sunday of Easter - May 8, 2016

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Well, we have reached the 7th Sunday of Easter, and the last chapter of Revelation, after a kind of hop-skip-and-jump tour of its contents. Today I invite you to turn to page 1008 in the pew Bible as we take a look at the conclusion of this strange and mysterious book.

Our reading begins with Christ saying that he is coming quickly, without delay, for the purpose of repaying everyone according to their work. Christ's coming among us is a present ongoing reality. Christ's presence among us reveals that our decisions have effects, our actions have consequences, we reap what we sow.



The risen Christ declares that he is the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end of all things. The book of Revelation does not provide us with a linear timetable of the end of time, but rather it reveals that the present ongoing reality of Christ's coming is both beginning and end simultaneously. The beginning of Christ's coming is the end, and the end of Christ's coming is a new beginning. Christ shows us that some things in our lives must come to an end in order for new life to begin.

Christ says that those who have washed their robes have access to the tree of life and can enter the city by the gates. The last two chapters of Revelation describe a new heaven and a new earth that takes the form of a holy city, a new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God right into the midst of this world (21:1-2).

One of the most important details about this holy city is that its gates will never be shut (21:25). We build gates to keep some people in and to keep other people out, but in this holy city the gates will never be shut. A concept beautifully depicted by Barbara Hines in her painting "Our Feet Stand Firm within Your Gates." People will be free to come and go. No one will be kept in against their will, and no one will be kept out against their will. There is no one standing guard at these gates, no one to stop anyone from coming or going. Entry through the gates of the holy city does not require a passport or any kind of security check. This detail about the holy city is really, really important for helping us understand verse 15 which was omitted from this morning's reading: Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolators, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. These are persons who do not or cannot choose to

enter this holy city that has been made clean, whole, and just by the ruler of all things. Yet the gates will never be shut. Why?

In verse 17, the Spirit and the bride speak words of invitation. **[STEP 1]** Remember that in Revelation the bride is the holy city coming down from heaven, the holy city with wide open



gates that will never be shut. The Spirit and Holy-City-Bride invite all to come. The Spirit and the Holy-City-Bride invite all who hear their invitation to tell others to come. The Spirit and the Holy-City-Bride invite all who are thirsty to come inside and take the water of life as a gift. The image of the Spirit and the Holy-City-Bride inviting everyone to come inside, to find shelter and nourishment within the new world God is making, evokes Jesus' invitation "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). The invitation is for all people. The invitation stands forever, just like the gates of the city that will never be shut. God yearns for all people, without exception, to

enter those gates, to come to the Christ who promises to give rest and refreshment.

Our scriptures for today take us deep into God's vision and desire for all people. **[STEP 2]** In this morning's gospel lesson, we get to listen in as Jesus prays for us. On the night of his betrayal and arrest, Jesus prayed for his disciples, not just the ones who were gathered at the table with him, but for all those who would in time come to believe in him. That includes you and me. As we listen in to Jesus' prayer for us, we hear that Jesus wants his followers to be one, just as Jesus and God are one. Jesus prays: As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be one in us ... I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one ... for the sake of the world (John 17: 21-22).



What I hear in Jesus' prayer is not so much a desire for unity, as much as a yearning for intimacy. Richard Rohr describes intimacy as our capacity for closeness and tenderness, which makes love possible (Immortal Diamond, p. 159). What we hear in Jesus' prayer is the "big and hidden secret" that an infinite, immortal God seeks and desires intimacy — oneness — with finite, mortal human beings (Ibid, p. 164). Why? (1) Because God loves us, and love is transmitted through the closeness and tenderness of intimacy. Intimacy is also scary, it involves a high degree of risk, even for God, because intimacy can only happen when we reveal and expose our insides to another (Ibid, p. 168). The crucified and risen Christ reveals the wounded-ness and vulnerability of a loving God who yearns for intimacy with us and will to hell and back to make that intimacy possible (Ibid, p. 167). (2) Jesus prays that his followers will experience intimacy not just with

God through him, but with each other in community. Intimacy is good for us. The experience of intimacy is essential for healthy emotional, psychological, and spiritual growth. Rohr observes that “people who risk intimacy are invariably happier and much more real people” while “people who avoid intimacy are always ... imprisoned in a small and circular world” (Ibid, p. 172). This is why Jesus invites us to come to him with our burdens. This is why the gates of the holy city will never be shut — God imposes no barriers between himself and us. This is why the Spirit and the Holy-City-Bride cry, “come ... come ... take the water of life”

So the good news for today is that the risen Christ, together with the Holy Spirit and the Holy-City-Bride, are inviting all people without exception into an intimate life-giving relationship — that’s what it means to come and take the water of life as a gift. Even better news is that Jesus is not just inviting all people, but is actively praying for this to happen. Jesus is praying for you and for me, for your loved ones, for your neighbor who believes s/he is not worthy of God’s love, and even for those we label enemies of God.

So this morning, let’s try a little exercise in intimacy with Christ. Take a minute or two to identify one thing in your life that you would like Jesus to pray for and care about. One place where you are in need of oneness, wholeness, peace. [pause for one minute]

If you would like to know that not only is Jesus praying for you, but that your brothers and sisters in Christ are also praying for you, you can write that one thing on a prayer card or piece of paper, and place it in the prayer basket when you come up for communion. You don’t have to put your name on it. The prayer team will also pray for you in Jesus’ name.

[Wait one minute before moving to the Hymn of the Day]