

Revealed in a new reality!

Revelation 21:1-10, 21:22 - 22:5

John 14: 23-29

Joel Barker says, “Vision without action is only a dream. Action without vision is just passing the time. Vision with action can change the world.” Chapters 21 and 22 of the Book of Revelation provides us with a new vision. It’s a vision of the Holy City of Jerusalem descending out of Heaven and this is paired with the vision of John recounting Jesus’ promise to the disciples that when he is no longer with them, God will send the Holy Spirit in his name and they will never again be alone. So, what does this mean?

It means that we no longer need an intermediary. “Christ will be present in and through the church by the indwelling of the Spirit.”¹ So, God dwells here with us on Earth. God is our light. The sun and the moon are ever present. We are living in the new time created through Jesus resurrection. The Holy Spirit is alive and well and is moving in and through each of us.

It says in Revelation, “And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great high mountain, showed me the Holy city Jerusalem coming down out of Heaven from God and I saw no temple in the city for its temple is the Lord God. And the city has no need for the sun or moon to shine on it for the glory of God is its light and its lamp is the Lamb. Its gates will never be shut by day and there will be no night there.” This says to me that God cannot be contained. The Divine presence does not need to be enclosed for it will invade the whole city. The city is God’s church. The vision in these words of scripture today call for us to answer the question; what does God require of us here and now? “What ministries and communities are Christians called to bring into being and in what ways can the human city be shaped to reflect the priorities and values of the kingdom of God? In the urban community the simple question ‘Who is my neighbour?’ demands an answer.”² What has been revealed to us through Jesus’ resurrection is that it is our turn, it is our mission to love our neighbours. It is our calling now to unleash the Holy Spirit to move and flow in and among us without us putting up barriers trying to contain it and stop it from being free. Andrew Davy in his book ‘Urban Christianity and Global Order’ writes the following:

¹ Joseph H. Britton, *Feasting on the Word; Year C, Volume 2* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), p. 486.

² Andrew Davey, *Urban Christianity and Global Order; Theological Resources for an Urban Future*, (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002), p. 8.

“The quintessential urban experience is the encounter with the stranger on an intimate as well as an immense scale. This will inevitably involve the meeting of cultures. The meeting of ethnic cultures from different parts of the planet, rural and urban cultures or the cultures of different blocks or streets that exist in proximity.”³

The question is how we will live publicly as a faith community. This church, when it was first built over 100 hundred years ago was built on the very edge of the city. There was no bridge to the Glenora area. There was no secured funding to ensure that this building would be built and be successful and live on 100 years later. There was no guarantee that the people would come, and this place would continue to thrive and serve its community. And yet, here we are, still today; this church, the space and all the people who participate in the life of the church, this is a beacon of hope to all people in this area and it is a safe space for all people.

I shared with you the quote this morning, ‘Vision without action is only a dream. Action without vision is just passing the time. But, vision with action can change the world.’ The people who built this place had a vision and action. We have a vision of truly being a welcoming and inclusive community here in Edmonton. We have a vision that this space will be a space of safety for all people who do not feel safe anywhere else. This is a place for all God’s people, all God’s creatures, where they can feel that they belong. We long for this space, this place to inspire; to be a place of questioning and dialogue where we enter awkward conversations with hope and with the belief that through mutual respect and love we can learn from one another and become better and strive for peace which Jesus offers us.

We the faith community continue to live out the practice of inclusion rather than exclusion while balancing and honouring the diversity that exists when the cultures of this different world come together. We continue to be transformed by the words of God, the message of the Gospel and the practice of loving our neighbour. Jesus promised that his resurrection would be a blessing, that the whole world would see and know that the things that were cast down were being raised up and things that were old were now being made new. Jesus did not say that things were being replaced. Jesus was not replaced by the Holy Spirit. Jesus was transformed and we now experience God and Jesus in the Spirit.

Friends, things are being transformed around us. How we experience the Divine was transformative and we need to remember as Jesus said that in this transformation, in this need to change and be transformed that we should not be afraid. Too often we resist change because we fear that that things we love are being replaced, but they are not. They are being made new; transformed, refurbished, brought back to life again. What is being transformed in our midst is being transformed because it was built on a strong foundation, a strong history, a strong tradition. Because of that we can transform and bring it back to new life. As this city continues to grow

³ Andrew Davey, p.8.

and change and develop, we need to explore new ways of loving our neighbour; new ways of engaging this community through sacredness, through compassion, through love for all.

How do we bring new life here to the church? How will we transform our practice of charity, for instance, into compassion, reconciliation and ally-ship? It's not enough to simply give, give, give. We want to work together so all resources are shared among people so that everyone has what they need to live in the way that they have been called; with dignity and with respect. How will we care for all creation as this city grows? How will we care for our environment in the small green spaces that exist still? How will we breathe new life into our concrete jungle? How will we embrace life around us as the air warms and new life grows? And how can we transform the myth that this building is so sacred that it should never be touched, that it should always be quiet? How can we change that myth so that people truly know that they are welcome without expectation; that they are welcomed with love?

I see a vision of this place not only thriving within but pulsing and moving out into the streets. We have an opportunity and it has already started. As I came here yesterday for a wedding, as I walked along the side, there were people everywhere. Not just on the street, but in our gardens. Our gardeners were here planting and engaging the city. Children, adults and seniors stopped to be part of what was happening here. We've seen it as people have come and shared throwing a ball with a dog; embracing all life in different ways. As the farmers market will soon crop up on a Sunday morning, how can we engage even more, our neighbours? This is a chance where we could be seen, felt and heard. Where they can know what we truly mean by being a welcome and inclusive congregation, but it takes all of us. It takes all of us to unleash this spirit and be felt everywhere in this world.

So, I hope today that you will take time to think what is it that God is calling us to be about today in this world; not just in this sanctuary, but in this world. Who are the people now on the margins, like when this church was on the edge, the edge of the city? Who are the people who need our friendship, our support, our compassion and our understanding? How can we share the abundance that we have received, the peace that Jesus has given us, with all in this world? That is what we are called to be about today. Let us go in peace.