

“Seeing the Future”
By Rev. Frances Savill
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Readings:

Rev 21:10,22-22:5

This morning, we get to see how all of life, all of creation, how all this, our enfolding story turns out.

We get to look at to the end of the book and see God’s plan completed.

What do you picture?

Some people expect a return to Eden- a garden landscape.

A whole new world is what others expect.

But that is not what the Bible says.

Listen. John saw a new creation, Jerusalem remade, not rebuilt by human hands, but coming from God.

Did you ever picture the fulfillment of God’s plan as a city?

The place where heaven and earth meet will be a city?

We usually think of cities as sort of necessary evil.

The city is the place you go to when you don't want to be caught doing something you shouldn't be doing.

It's the place where every vice and hedonistic pleasure is there for the taking.

When we want to get things right with God and with one another we say things like "we want to get out of the rat-race" meaning we want to leave the city, or we want to "get away from it all", all the noise the congestion, the business.

French philosopher Jacques Ellul said: "The cities of man have been built as part of our attempt to run from God, to make our own world apart from God away from the claims of the living God."

"Look! A City." says the Revelation.

It is not an escapist vision of the future at all.

A city. A holy city.

It is the city we city builders have longed to build, and all of us have longed to live in.

But built by God.

This is not our doing.

This city is not the result of some “evolutionary urge” written into the old creation.

The city coming with Jesus is God’s doing, God’s work.

God is the architect.

At the fulfillment of all things, when Jesus returns in all his glory, John sees not an end, but a new beginning.

The first book of the Bible begins with creation.

The last book of the Bible ends with creation.

God’s story has creation for its first words, has creation for its last word.

The one on the throne says “Behold, I am making all things new.”

Sometimes we hear those words and think God is making all new things- but that’s not what it says.

It says all things will be redeemed, and made new.

This new city is where God lives.

“Look the tabernacle of God is among men and women, and he shall dwell among them, and they shall be his *peoples*.”

Not just people, but “peoples”.

This is another surprise for John who was a life-long Jew.

God gathers up within God the full range of the world’s ethnic diversity.

God’s glory does not obliterate “Stuff” buildings and trees and gardens, and walls, and roads, it also does not obliterate “peoples.”

No one ethnic grouping can bear or manifest the full image of God.

It takes all of us.

And in the new city, we are all there as God’s multi-ethnic race.

What a place this will be!

This is God’s original intention for creation fulfilled.

John’s heaven is no world-denying Nirvana. The new city is God’s original earthy dream brought to completion.

There is no more sea, these are symbolic words, not meaning literally that there won't be lakes and rivers and oceans.

But symbolically the sea is the place of chaos. The waters of the deep are the chaos that continues to threaten the world, to suck the world back into the void of nothingness.

The other thing that is missing from the great city that God prepares is the Temple.

This must be the greatest surprise of all.

This is unheard of, undreamed of!

A city for the Jews that had no Temple, a city for the Christian that had no church?

How can God's city have no house of worship?

The temple for John was the place where God chose to dwell.

But what was revealed to John was that the city was the Temple, all of it.

The whole city is the temple.

The new heaven and the new earth are the temple!

What Jesus shows John is that God's dwelling place is no longer an identifiable separate space within the city.

God's dwelling place is the city itself.

All is Temple.

All is sacred space.

We come to dwell *in* God, in the circle of Holy love that has forever existed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Because God's presence fills the city, God's glory lights it up. All of it is filled with light, the glory of God.

The gates of the city are never closed. No closed gates, no closed borders, no more fear.

The river of life flows from the throne of God and the Lamb.

Zoe life- the abundant life of God flows from God and Jesus to all the peoples.

The tree of life bears fruit every month, and the leaves are for the healing of the peoples.

“And they shall see his face and his name will be written on their foreheads.”

Moses was told that he couldn't see the face of God and live.

But something is going to happen to us that will make it possible to see the face of God,

1 Jn 3:2 tells us that we shall be like Jesus.

And we are going to be drawn into this relationship of the Trinity and know God as we are fully known, and see him face to face.

The new city shines with the beauty of the Lamb.

The new city radiates the glory of the Lamb.

The new city enters into intimacy with the Lamb.

The new city is finally about partners embracing in a face to face dance of affection and creativity and dominion.

This ending is breaking into the world right now.

The future that Jesus revealed to John and then which John described to us in this book

Revelation is not far away in either time or space.

It is close at hand.

Very close.

Pressing in, pressing in, pressing in, calling us to live the future in the present.

And we catch glimpses of it if we have our eyes open.

The Apostle Paul compares the coming new creation to childbirth, there are signs, and if you watch a pregnant woman sometimes you can catch a glimpse of a heel or a foot or an elbow.

One day we will see this new creation, and all of us made new completed.

And we fully know even as we are fully known.

Seeing the end gives me patience and hope, joy and expectation.

It is the anchor of our faith.

It is the ground of our hope and the promise of the gospel.

It is the foundation to live from this day.

Thanks be to God.