

**6<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Easter – May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022**  
**WE ARE THE NEW JERUSALEM!**

*Prayer*

Jesus, you indeed are the light of the world. Illumine our hearts and minds through the indwelling Holy Spirit so that we can understand and act upon what you've revealed in these scriptures.

AMEN

*Not!*

In good Lutheran fashion, I first want to say what today's reading isn't about. The bulletin cover is a clue – its what came up first in the search results when I Googled "New Jerusalem" for images. To fully understand the image, I need to read verses 15 – 20 of this chapter:

*<sup>15</sup> And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. <sup>16</sup> The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. <sup>17</sup> He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement. <sup>18</sup> The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. <sup>19</sup> The foundations of the wall*

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*of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, <sup>20</sup> the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. <sup>21</sup> And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.*

In what must by now be a familiar refrain, a literal interpretation of this text, as depicted on the bulleting cover, a huge, Borg-like Cube descending from outer space, is NOT what the author intended; this passage needs to be read and understood as apocalyptic language.

Just as Pastor Toma explained a couple of weeks ago that there will be more than 144,000 people in heaven, the numbers 12, 12x12, and 10x10x10 (or one thousand) are used symbolically in reference to completeness. Similarly, the 12,000 stadia in all three dimensions and 12x12 thickness of the walls are also references to the completeness of the New Jerusalem, the Bride of Christ, the Church.

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*New Jerusalem*

If the text is not meant to be taken literally, what can we learn from the description?

As I explained last week, a strong case can be made that you and I, the church, are the New Jerusalem – In his first letter to the church in Corinth (1 Cor 6:19 – 20) St. Paul writes:

*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*

And in his letter to the Ephesians (Eph 2:19-22), he states:

*<sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

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There are several words that are used repeatedly in the passage – pure, clear, and precious; let's look at each one in turn.

*Pure*

St. John in his 3<sup>rd</sup> letter speaks to our purity:

*<sup>2</sup> Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. <sup>3</sup> And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*

And whenever we sing the Offertory, we quote David in the Psalms (Ps 51:10), where clean has also been translated as pure:

*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me*

And what is pure? It means that all evil, all corruption has been removed; while this won't happened completely this side of heaven, that process of cleaning being with the washing away of sins at our baptism.

*Clear*

What about clear (or transparent)?

The writer of Hebrews (Heb 4:13) says:

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*And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

God know us better than we know ourselves, nothing is hidden from him. He knows all of our flaws, faults, frailties, and failures and still loves us; in fact, in was because of these that He send His son into the world to die and make atonement for them.

*Precious*

And precious? It means something that is valuable, costly. St. Luke, in his Gospel (Lk 12:24) writes:

*Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!*

And Peter, in his first letter (I Pet 18:19), recounts the prices Jesus paid for our salvation:

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*<sup>18</sup> knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.*

It's hard to fully comprehend – the creator of the universe considers you and I, fallen sinners, to be so valuable that he sent His son, Jesus, as a willing sacrifice to restore the relationship that was broken in the fall.

*Tribes and Apostles*

The number twelve, referring to both the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles is repeated over and over. The position and description of the gates echo the placement of the twelve tribes around the tabernacle, God's dwelling place among his people as the children of Israel moved from Egypt to the promised land. This reinforces the continuity of faith between what we call the Old Testament and the new. And that New Testament was written primarily either by those twelve apostles who were eyewitnesses to the earthly ministry of Christ or those closely associated with them.

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And if you've done any study of those heroes of the faith, you'll quickly see that they had feet of clay. God uses the most unlikely and ordinary people – among them murderers, adulterers, liars, skeptics, and thieves – tell the story of man's fall and God's redemption from generation to generation. And still today he uses ordinary sinner like you and I as his instruments to convey his message of salvation, in both words to deeds, to a fallen world. In his gospel, Matthew (Matt 5:14-16) writes:

*<sup>14</sup> "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*

It's my prayer for all of us that we would indeed be the light of the world in our everyday lives as Jesus calls us to join him each day on His mission to let everyone know that because of His death and resurrection, that the relationship between creator and created has been restored!  
AMEN.