

Reflection on 22 May 2022

Loving God, you provide for our every need. You feed our bodies and our souls. Yet we hunger to know and love you more and more. Nourish us with your word today. Through Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5

Life in the New Jerusalem

The reading today depicts the culmination of the Christian faith journey. It shows us Christianity's view of Heaven, a place of beauty, peace, and perpetual light that emanates from the Lamb. In comparison with the present dire situation in the world, it can be seen too good to be true. Yet, we will not be able to work for a better world in the present without this promised vision. In *Christian Behaviour*, C. S. Lewis says, "If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were...those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this (world). Aim at Heaven, and you will get the earth thrown in. Aim at earth, and you will get neither." Indeed, the image of the New Jerusalem helps us to endeavour to bring such a world here and now.

So we are naturally attracted to the description of the New Jerusalem. Apart from the light, whose source is the Lamb, we see the River of Life and the Tree of Life with 12 kinds of fruit that symbolise abundant life. The imagery here can be related to Ezekiel 47. Ezekiel is brought in a vision of the Temple in Jerusalem, which will be rebuilt and refilled with glory one day. Here Ezekiel sees a trickle of water emerging from the Temple. It's just a trickle, just a little stream of water. But the Spirit of God and Ezekiel then begin to follow that little trickle, and he discovers it has somehow become ankle-deep. In the end, it becomes a vast and mighty river that flows out toward the desert, making fertile what was dry ground and sweet what had been before salty water.

We who can use running water every day may take water for granted. But we know that water is so precious in many other places, as no life can be sustainable without water. There, the phrase 'water of life'¹ is associated with the satisfaction of deep spiritual needs as much as physical needs. Also, the tree of life is on either side of the river. We haven't encountered the

¹ Revelation - 7:17; 21:6; 22:1; 22:17

tree of life after the Garden of Eden. Now we see it again, which is no longer guarded, and it is producing fruit for the people of the holy city. In the new Jerusalem, there will be no more death. Ezekiel also saw the same vision: a river bordered on both sides by trees of which fruits shall be for food and its leaf for healing.² As C S Lewis mentioned before, we Christians endeavour to live the life in the New Jerusalem that begins here and now. Today we are celebrating one another's lives, especially Gwenda's 90th birthday in the presence of her loving family. Just look around to see how Gwenda has produced 12 kinds of fruit! We see that the River of Life and the Tree of Life are not such distant future realities, but they are here already among/within us in plain sight. We thank God for celebrating Gwenda's birthday together with others' life events, and the Lamb through whom we become the one family of God. Amen.

² Ezekiel 47:12