

Prayer of the Day:

Almighty God and Savior, you have set the final day and hour when we shall be delivered from this world of sin and death. Keep us ever watchful for the coming of your Son that we may sit with him and all your holy ones at the marriage feast in heaven; through Jesus Christ, your son, our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. They are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple. Alleluia. (Revelation 7:15a cf. NIV)

Sermon Text:

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth (Revelation 1:4-5).

Read the Lesson

It's always nice to come home. Vacations are really nice, time away from the regular grind relaxes the body and refreshes the mind. But no matter how nice time away is, it's always nice to get back home, everything exactly where you have placed it (well except when we misplace it), the comfort of your own bed, the easy of the old familiar routine. Perhaps Judy Garland said it best, there really is no place like home.

That was my first thought as I read through this section of the book of Revelation as God gives John a glimpse of the city of God. While I've never been there, and it all certainly seems to be far from routine, as we see the river and the road, the throne and the saints, it feels as if God is setting out the welcome mat with you and me in mind. Dear brothers and sisters, **WELCOME HOME!**

Let's peer at the picture for a bit this morning. A crystal-clear river flows in this pristine setting. It is the river of the water of life and already we are transported through the great history book that is the Word of our God. This time we are outside Sychar perched beside Jacob's well. Jesus is there and a Samaritan woman approaches. Thirsty after the journey Jesus asks for a drink. The woman protests a bit because this is outside the social norms of the day and then Jesus says, *"If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water. (John 4:10)"* *"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. (John 4:13-14)"*

A great road also runs through the city down either side of the the river and as the eye follows both of we find the source of the water, it's no great surprise. It is *flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb*. Do you see it? God's throne and the Lamb's throne are the same. Jesus is God almighty, eternal, all-knowing, and the city belongs to Him even as it belongs to the Father and the Holy Spirit.

On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. We'll come back for this in just a moment. I bet you missed something in all the glory. I did the

Text: Revelation 22:1-5

22:1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. 3 No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. – NIV84

first time I saw it too. *And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.* Oh, my dear Lord Jesus, how we need those leaves today, every day, throughout the pages of history and into the pages yet unwritten.

No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. It takes my breath away every time. This is perfection, in all its glory. Eden undone as we stand in the unmitigated glory of God not the back as Moses once was able to view but the very face of the King of Creation, the Triune God unveiled, the mysteries known, not from reading and believing but from seeing as Thomas once demanded. Yes this is city of God where the curse is gone forever, no sin, only perfection.

But then does such a statement give you pause? How in God's great name can I be here? How can I stand here? When I know so well that I have contributed to the destruction of the nations, to the desecration of perfection, when I would mar the beauty of this place with my sins which flow from me in thought and word and deed? Should I grab for the leaves of the tree? Or run with all my might from this sacred place because I am simply unworthy of it, can never make myself worthy of it?

Ah, but perhaps even as we turn to run we see the tree again. I told you we would come back to it. It is simply unlike anything that has ever existed or will exist again. Irenaeus once wrote that the word used here for tree would be the Greek counterpart for the wood bound and in a bundle and placed upon the back of Isaac for that sacrifice yet unknown as he and Abraham journeyed up the mountain side. It is also the word used for the wood pole which would have held the serpent made of brass, the Old Testament type of Christ that saved the Israelites in the desert whose life ebbed away after the strike of the venomous snakes or the wood used to fashion a cross timbers fashioned together to hold the body of our Savior as He sacrificed for us. Doesn't the Bible even say it Jesus was hung upon the wood of the tree of the cross? This is how we stand here miraculously partaking of the fruit of this tree lovingly given from the hand of the Spirit, His fruit of faith given to us that sinners might be servants, saints, of God.

Oh, and those servants, we now begin to behold them as well. Faces so familiar as we begin to examine each of them. Loved ones who have finished their race and keep the faith. You no doubt know them all by name. There are those who came through the great tribulation. Peter, James, and John, Mary Martha, Elizabeth, over there is Luther. How did we miss him before and Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, David, John the Baptist they are all here staring at you rejoicing with you. They are happy to see you have finally arrived, that you stand among the servants ready to serve in this place, in this perfection.

They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. Yes dear friends, this is the home of His servants who reign forever and ever.

Finally, finally, we will serve Him as we have always longed to serve Him here on earth. Far too often as we bring our gifts of time and talent and treasure, they fall flat, stained by the sin which so often clings to us but this is no longer the case here. Here the curse is gone. Sin is gone. Our perfect service can finally be rendered, is rendered, before our God forever in this perfection which He has won, provided, gifted to each of us.

Now, for now, all of this is but a revelation. For now God has asked us to serve Him here with His Word in an imperfect world that even more might join that throng. But someday, oh someday, faith will give way to sight and we shall stand in glory, stand in the very presence of God, before this river, on this road, before this tree, in this unapproachable light and then we will hear it. God will look at each of us and speak the words we have so longed to hear. Well done My good and faithful servants, **WELCOME HOME! AMEN!!**

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen (Revelation 1:5-6).

Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near. Amen (Revelation 1:3).