

## **“Light and Life from the Lamb”**

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Congregational Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts  
May 22, 2022 – Sixth Sunday of Easter  
Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5; John 13:31-35

Please pray with me: “O God, take our minds and think through them, take our lips and speak through them, and take our hearts and set them on fire. Amen”  
(William Sloane Coffin).

Today, we continue our Eastertide series of scripture readings from the Book of Revelation and the Gospel according to John. In our first reading from the Revelation, John, the exiled bishop of the Christian churches in and around Ephesus of western Asia Minor, reveals to us what was revealed to him from a great and high mountain, a place throughout our Scriptures where God reveals the highest and loftiest truths concerning the identities of God and God’s people. It was on the mountaintop at Sinai that God revealed to Moses the ideal ways of life for God’s people in the Ten Commandments. And it was on the mountaintop of Transfiguration that God revealed Jesus’ identity as God’s beloved Son, the living embodiment of the Commandments and all the Hebrew Scriptures. Though his body was in exile on the island of Patmos, John’s spirit was taken up to the mountaintop where he witnessed the New Jerusalem coming out of heaven. In the verse just before our passage for today’s reading, this descending Holy City is also called the Bride of Christ, which is a name given throughout the New Testament for Christ’s Church. What was being revealed to John on the mountain was not a vision of a literal city at all, but a lofty vision of the Church, the ideal image of all those who follow Christ.

And as I have mentioned in previous weeks’ sermons concerning the Book of Revelation, these words were written and given to the people of John’s churches to strengthen and encourage them as they struggled against efforts to get them to worship local gods and the gods of Rome, especially the Roman emperor, who then demanded to be worshipped as lord and god. John’s book reminded Christ’s Church of their identity as a people who are not worshippers of Caesar or the gods of any other people, but who are worshippers of Christ, who is the Lamb, and Christ alone and are followers of his way alone.

The people of the Lamb's flock, no matter the dreadful darkness surrounding them, have the paths of their lives illuminated by Christ. No matter the harm their bodies may face because of their faithfulness, by walking in the light of Christ's way, their spirits are made and kept alive, nourished forever the ever-ripe fruit of the tree of life and the ever-flowing stream of the water of life. The way of the Lamb's people is a way full of light and life.

We, dear friends, are part of this flock of the Lamb, and so the way of light and life is to be our way. This is our loftiest ideal, and is to guide all of our being and doing. And as the gates of the holy city are never shut, all are welcome to come in and enjoy the blessings of participating in this holy way, no matter who they are, whom they love, or where they are on life's journey. Light and life are freely offered for all.

This is good news, for all are in need of light and life. The world has changed much since the days of the Roman empire, and yet, in many ways, the needs of the world remain unchanged, especially where the dark ways of the world have remained unchanged. The darkness of nations making war against others to grow empires continues, as we see now in the hellish destruction that has befallen the people of Ukraine by the selfish and power-hungry leaders and armed forces of their neighbor Russia. Sadly, this unjust way of darkness and death is embraced and supported by the selfish and power-hungry leadership of the Church in Russia, rather than being condemned by them, and so Church leaders there are following the way of the Roman imperial cult of John's day instead of calling their people to be the holy city filled with light and life that they are called to be. I pray for the Spirit of God to remind us all again of the words and ways of the Lamb, that just as Christ gave peace to his disciples, we are always to give peace to one another and our neighbors.

Of course, much more of God's light and life are needed here in our own land and churches as well. We see darkness in our own violent acts, which are so common, they cease to be shocking. We've had more than 200 mass shootings in the United States already this year; that's about 2.5 mass shootings *per day*! Many of these are fueled by the darkness of fear and hate of others, such as last week's shooting in Buffalo, during which a white killer took the lives of 10 people simply because they were Black.

We must turn from the darkness of seeing people's lives as being less than our own because of how they look, who their parents are, where they were born, whom they love, or how they worship. As a church, we must always speak and work against the darkness of hatred of the other. May our inclusive ways be a beacon of life and light that displaces this darkness in our own community. May the fruit of justice grow ripe here in our time. May the waters that give life flow about us and through us. May the leaves that heal grow around us and within us. May the fruit of peace be enjoyed in abundance among all the earth's people, and may the feast begin within each of our hearts today. Amen.