

Revd Canon Dr Rosalyn Murphy

Week 6: Reflection 6: Revelation 22.1-7

The River of Life

¹ Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³ Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; ⁴ they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

⁶ And he said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true, for the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.”

⁷ “See, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”

(Silence.)

This is a scripture reading that promises so much hope, and yet it challenges us. The reference to the ‘healing of the nations begs us to question, ‘Why will healing be necessary in the Holy City of God?’

John, the seer offers us a glimpse into God’s heavenly city as he describes the River of Life. We can vividly imagine this pristine stream of peaceful waters flowing directly from God’s throne through the city centre – a place where nothing cursed can be found. This word ‘cursed’ or [κατάθεμα — ka-tá • thē’ma (from the Grk. root ka-ta’ra)], is often used to describe people who have been marred or maimed, individuals perceived to be objects of scorn, shame, and disregard.

Yet, scripture teaches us that Jesus’ was such a person. In fact, Paul writes in Galatians 3.13 that Christ bore the curse (ka-ta’ra) for us in his crucifixion. And his resurrected body displayed the marks of the persecution and death he suffered. Does this mean that some wounds that mar us in this life are too deep to heal?

Nothing is impossible with God. The healing leaves of the Tree of Life testify that there is hope in a future life for those unable to find solace and restorative healing here on earth. Yet, I cannot – indeed I choose not – to believe that because God’s grace is abundant that the sin of racism and privilege that mar and afflict so many in this world should be allowed to continue, simply because God’s perfect healing is possible in the life to come. As the Apostle Paul writes, “Heaven forbid! By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it?”

As we look to the joy and victory of the Easter story, we are compelled to remember it was Jesus’ ‘ministry of presence’ which strengthened and emboldened his disciples. Through his marred wounds and scarred

hands, he reached out and encouraged them to become men and women of God that would transform the world. His presence empowered them to go and proclaim his message of redemption – boldly and unashamedly through God’s amazing grace.

But, absolutely nothing is impossible with God. The world vision God unveils to John offers hope of a promise deferred; until we – God’s people, all brothers, and sisters in Christ – can more fully comprehend Jesus’ warning:

“See, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps (who observes, that adheres to, who fulfills and obeys) the words of the prophecy of this book.”

Revelation 22.7

And the prophecy of which John writes – clearly depicts a multitude of nations – equal, harmonious, united, and redeemed in the love of God.

Healing (in this life) is possible. It often begins with a listening ear and a sincere acknowledgement of the scorn, shame, and disregard many endure because of the colour of their skin and ethnic origin. A kind or gentle recognition of this reality starts the restorative process – from which lasting alliances are forged. Through God’s grace, these unique bonds of friendship slowly diminish looks of disinterest, and attitudes of indifference – together they diminish the endless counter arguments, and they also quiet the voices of privilege from those who fail to fully grasp or are reluctant to embrace God’s vision of unity and equality. The privilege to participate in this healing work is a response to God’s missional call, and a remarkable by-product of his amazing grace.

