

Sermon for the 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter – May 22, 2022  
Thankful Memorial Episcopal Church, Chattanooga  
Kelton Riley, Seminarian

Acts 16:9-15

Revelation 21:10,22-22:5

John 5:1-9

*“Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”*

*“Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”* These past few weeks, as I have emerged from the slog of a heavy semester and even heavier finals, I have returned my attention to the world outside of seminary, and the news from around the country and the world have made this command of Christ terribly difficult to obey. Everything around us seems to be blowing up, and suddenly the stress of grades, of local cares and joys and heartaches all seem so terribly petty in comparison. War rages in the Ukraine. The mass shooting in Buffalo, New York left ten people dead and another three injured, demonstrating yet again the deadliness of the disease of white supremacy that continues to plague our country. Anti-trans forces have mounted to legislate against life-saving medical care for transgender youth in Texas, Alabama, and other states. Covid cases are once again spiking across the northeast, bringing with them uncertainty about the future of the pandemic. A formula shortage has proved a nightmare for mothers desperate to feed their babies. How can our hearts *not* be troubled? How can we let them *not* be afraid? At this time, the glorious kingdom of John’s Revelation seems so very, very far away.

Throughout chapter 14 of John’s gospel, Jesus makes many promises to his disciples:

- I go to and prepare a place for you
- I will come again and will take you to myself
- You may ask for anything in my name, and I will do it
- I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you
- The Holy Spirit will teach you all things
- Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.

I imagine that, despite Christ’s abundant promises, the disciples experienced significant anxiety at the prospect of Jesus returning to the Father. Truly the world in which they and which we continue to live does not give peace as Christ gives it. Often, rather, the world has a way of robbing from us what little peace we manage to find. Darkness, violence, disease, and oppression—forces which seem so constant and relentless in our world—tempt us towards cynicism and coldness. Amidst the strife and anxiety of the age, the simple joys of hope and belief can seem a fool’s errand—the good news like a childish fairytale. When life deals out death and trauma, it may seem that the last thing the world wants is our belief, our feeble *“thoughts and prayers.”* And yet... now, like never before, what our wounded, aching world needs most is visionaries who can remind it how to believe in something *worth* believing in. With each new onslaught from the Enemy, our world is losing its sense of childlike wonder—and is as children that we enter into the Kingdom of God. This vision, with its renewed sense of wonder and innocent belief is what John allows us to glimpse in today’s portion of his Revelation:

“And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it for the glory of God is its light... there will be no night there... Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as a crystal... On either side of the river is the tree of life... and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations... the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.” It is a remarkable vision, feeding the deepest longing of the human soul. And this impossible vision, this cosmic myth, this celestial fairytale is the truest, *truest* thing you will ever hear.

The state of the world has a way of leaving us feeling powerless. What can we possibly do in the face of so much suffering? How can we as the church even begin to make a dent in the mountain of need and anguish that our world is going through? How can our flickering little candle even begin to lighten the darkness? We can take some peace in John’s Revelation, which reminds us that it is not our light upon which the world depends. “God will be their light.” And in His light, we see afresh the promises of Christ:

- The Holy Spirit will teach you all things
- Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.
- Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

The urgency of the world indeed calls us to action, and surely there is much to do—votes to cast, protests to wage, mourners to comfort, hungry bellies to feed, truth to speak. But in the midst of our work, let us not forget to return again and again to the otherworldly peace that is our inheritance in Christ, the promise of that kingdom where there is no night, where life streams freely as crystalline waters, where the nations are healed. *Rest* in these promises. Let them restore and strengthen you for the struggles you are called to face. The world certainly needs our strivings towards justice and peace. But even more desperately, the world needs our hope, our ability to believe in something worth believing in. For to hope is to rebel against the darkness. When the state of the world tempts us towards cynicism, simply believing is the ultimate revolutionary act.