

Revelation 22:1-5 (Seventh Sunday of Easter—Series C)**“The River and Tree of Life”****Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT****May 29, 2022**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text is from Revelation 22:

¹And he showed to me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing out from the throne of God and of the Lamb. ²In between the city's main street and the river, on this side and on that, is the tree of life producing twelve fruits, bearing its fruit according to each month, and the leaves of the tree is for the healing of the nations. ³And any curse will no longer exist. And the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in her [the city], and His slaves will serve Him as worshipers. ⁴And they will see his face, and His name will upon their foreheads. ⁵And night will longer exist, and they do not have need of the light of a lamp and of the light of the sun, because the Lord God will shine upon them, and they will reign forever and ever.

What do you look forward to? Maybe Christmas, your birthday, going swimming, a vacation? What are you looking forward to?

As you think about that for a moment, I'd also ask you to think about what we, as Christians, look forward to in light of the text of Revelation that has been our companion throughout the Season of Easter. This morning we have arrived at the final chapter of God's revelatory-unveiling, not just of Revelation, but of all Holy Scripture. What is it that we, the people of God in Christ, look forward to? The answer from Revelation is clear: eternal life in body and soul in a new heaven and earth which God will make for all those who live by faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus has told us in His Word, “In the world you will have trouble” (John 16:33). The Lord Christ reveals the same throughout the Book of Revelation. We are troubled by sin. All of creation itself is in a state of corruption and decay because of the sin of Adam. The effects of sin are seen daily in our lives in the form of natural disasters, calamities, accidents, and

diseases. We see sin at work in people in our society, in our neighborhoods and workplaces, and around the globe. People hurt and harm each other with their wicked words and selfish actions. But we need not look any farther than ourselves to see sin at its worst. Sin isn't simply something outside us that has an impact on us from without. Sin is also within us. Our whole human nature is corrupt and full of sin. We think things contrary to God's Word. We do things against God's Word. We repeatedly fail to love God and to love our neighbor. We don't always keep His commandments. We rebel. We sin. As a result, we face the consequence of that sin which is ultimately death.

Death is God's punishment against sin. Humanity, the crown of God's creation, was made to live forever in fellowship and unity with the one, triune God. But Adam's rebellion destroyed that relationship. Adam's sin ended that everlasting life. Romans 5:12, "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned." Adam's one trespass led to condemnation for all people; by Adam's disobedience we were all made sinners (Rom. 5:18, 19).

That is why we live in sin. We live under the constant effects of sin which cause our trouble and suffering in this life. We have earned the wages of sin which is death. But that's not our end. That's not what we Christians look forward to. Returning to Romans 5, we read, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. . . . For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:8, 17 ESV). Jesus Christ is the victorious Lamb of God who has died on the cross for the sins of the world. He shed His holy, precious blood on the

tree of the cross to purchase humanity's complete forgiveness of sins. Jesus suffered our death and condemnation so that, through the forgiveness of sins, we might receive the free gift of eternal life. "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22 ESV). The eternal life that was forfeited because of sin is restored to all people through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ through the forgiveness of sins. As Luther reminds us in the *Small Catechism* on the Lord's Supper, "Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation."

And it is that life which you and I have received by grace through faith in Jesus Christ as a gift of God. Eternal life is truly a present reality. You have it now, today. John 3:36, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life." And John 17:3, "This is eternal life, that they know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." Even now as you believe in Christ your Savior, you also know that you have been chosen to eternal life out of pure grace in Christ without any merit of your own and no one can pluck you out of His hand.

But in this veil of tears, you and I do not yet experience the fullness of that life everlasting. Jesus said, "I came that [you] may have life and have it abundantly" (Jn. 10:10 ESV). That cannot happen in this world. That is why we look forward as Christians to the fullness of that life which is yet to be received.

Do we, then receive that full, complete eternal life when we die and our souls are immediately with Christ in heaven and our bodies are laid to rest in the earth? Not quite. For death has not yet been defeated. If death were defeated, well, we wouldn't be dead. Now there is something more that we look forward to beyond simply "dying and going to heaven,"

which will be wonderful, which will be paradise in which we will see God face to face. But, to borrow the cliché, “But wait! There’s more!”

There’s more than dying and going to heaven, as great as that will be because we will be with the Lord Jesus. There’s more because Jesus is the victorious and RISEN Lamb of God. Jesus is risen from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Cor. 15:20). If Jesus is the firstfruits, that means there must be fruit to follow—second fruits, third fruits. “For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:21-26 ESV).

Death is destroyed by the Lord Christ when He raises our bodies from the grave on the Last Day. Our souls which have been with Christ since the moment we fell asleep in the Lord are reunited with our bodies, raised from the dead in glory. We will be complete again—in body and soul as God intended. That which death separated is fully and completely restored. And it is in our risen and glorified bodies that we enter into the new heaven and earth. It is in the state of perfect righteousness, without sin, without the possibility of death, that you and I will enter into the new creation, the new Eden, where the one, triune God will live with us forever. **Then** we will have the fullness, the completeness, the wholeness of eternal life

And that’s really what Revelation 22 is about. It’s a picture of the abundant, full life we will have as children of God in the new heaven and earth. “The river of the water of life” is a

symbol of that life which God alone grants to us in Christ and sustains in us until the day of resurrection and then forever into eternity with Him. God and the Lamb, our Savior Jesus, will sustain in body and soul forever our communal life with God and His people in the new creation. Everything that we will ever need there will be supplied to us richly and in abundance, without work, without cost, as in the first Eden.

The new heaven and earth will be the Garden of Eden restored for us, God's people, to inhabit forever. God will be the temple and we, the Bride of the Lamb, the Church Triumphant, will be the Holy of Holies where God dwells with us face to face. The tree of life, which first appeared in Genesis 2:9, from which Adam and Eve were barred, returns here in the last book of Scripture, representing again abundant life and the lush surroundings that God will furnish and supply for us throughout eternity! There will be no curse as in this old creation, which is subject to sin. God's people from all nations will receive only the fullness of health and life, the absence of any spiritual or physical want.

This new creation, this Eden restored, is ours to inhabit forever. With the very fullness of life itself, our very actions and works will always be a worship of God and the Lamb. No matter what we do, it will always be done as an act of worship to Him who is our God and Lord and Savior. In the fullness and completeness of eternal life we, the saints of God in the new heaven and earth, will reign forever and ever.

With St. Peter, we can declare that "according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pet. 3:13 ESV). By the power of the Holy Spirit, continue to look forward to the day of resurrection at the Coming Again of our Lord Jesus Christ in glory. Continue to look forward to life eternal with God the Father, the

Son, and the Holy Spirit, in the new heaven and earth where you will be richly supplied with life in abundance. For this will be the culmination of all Gospel revelation in Holy Scripture. It is the goal of your faith. This life everlasting in the new creation, in resurrected body and soul, is truly what we are looking forward to. Amen.