

**Easter 6 - 2025**



The Rt Rev'd Chris McLeod - Dean

***Text: Revelation 21: 10 – 14; 21: 22 – 22.5***

Revelation 21:10-14

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

<sup>10</sup> And in the spirit<sup>[a]</sup> he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. <sup>11</sup> It has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal. <sup>12</sup> It has a great, high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates are inscribed the names that are the names<sup>[b]</sup> of the twelve tribes of the Israelites: <sup>13</sup> on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. <sup>14</sup> And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb

### **1) The challenge of the Book of Revelation**

I have mentioned a few times my affection for the Book of Revelation. Most people are at a loss to know what to do with it. Is it science fiction or a B grade horror movie? Is it a surrealistic word painting or a bad dream, a nightmare, written up. Many regard it as cryptic code to be deciphered as a map for world history or is it, as I regard it, to be more like inspirational poetry using symbolism and word pictures to draw us into a vision of God's hope and future. A time when the pain and suffering of this world, death, mourning and crying will be no more, and God will be with us completely and forever (Rev 21 3 – 4).

In the context of its time, written towards the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, and during a time of persecution by the Roman Empire under the reign of Domitian (81 – 96 CE) you can begin to see how the Book of Revelation is a book of, admittedly, strange comfort. In the end Babylon, that is Rome, will fall and the followers of Jesus will triumph in a new kingdom with a new city.

### **2) The vision of the future and the 2 cities**

In this morning's reading from the Book of Revelation, as we near the end of the divine drama, John is carried away by an angel and is given the vision of the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven. This city will be on the new earth and God himself will be at its centre, permeating all things. In the words of Julian of Norwich 'All will be well, and all manner of things will be well'. The new Jerusalem will be a very different city to that of Rome and symbolize a very different kingdom or empire to that of the

Roman Empire. You can get a sense of where John, the author of the Book of Revelation, is going with his thinking. The new Jerusalem contrasts with Rome, the symbol of all that is wrong with the Roman Empire of John the Divine's time.

This new city has caused a challenge to some interpreters and many Christians but has been a source of inspiration for many: St Augustine of Hippo and his work 'The City of God'; William Blake's mythic poem 'Jerusalem' which has been set to the stirring tune by Sir Hubert Parry, and Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech to name a few.

Does this new Jerusalem exist among us already or can it even be built here on earth as William Blake's 'Jerusalem' asks. Can this ideal city be established here on earth? Many have thought it could and many still think it can. Some may not know these words from the Book of Revelation, but there are many who believe Utopia can still be established here on earth.

Influential regarding an interpretation of the Book of Revelation is St Augustine of Hippo and his book 'The City of God'. Augustine was writing after the fall of Rome in 410 CE to the Visigoths of Eastern Europe, which was a great shock to Christian and Pagan alike. Augustine contrasts the two cities, Rome and the eternal city of God. One is not to be confused with the other, however, as he writes, the two cities are entangled together in this world, and intermixed until the last judgement effect their separation.' Augustine does not believe that we neglect one for the other, but we have a responsibility as citizens to contribute to the good of society. However, somewhat pessimistically, perhaps, but I think rightly, 'the quest for perfection and happiness through politics is doomed' (Richard Chartres, Introduction to City of God).

This is behind my rejection of the views and actions so often proposed by the various 'Moral Majority' movements and nationalist Christianity growing around the world. Whenever Christians believe our views can be imposed on others through legislature, or our nation can become a Christian nation, it tends to end badly, especially for minorities, and the compromises necessary to gain political power makes the Gospel look like very bad news rather than very good news. As evangelical author Philip Yancey states the one thing that can't be legislated is love (my paraphrase of 'Love and Power'). And love is at the heart of the Gospel.

### **3) Anticipating the Kingdom by thought and action.**

We know from other texts from the Bible that we are not called to stand idly by in this world in the face of injustice (E.g. Micah 6: 8; Matthew 25: 31 – 36) As Christians we are called to action, and to live in anticipation of the Kingdom that will come, and yes we are called to work within our

democratic system. This is the 'already and not yet' paradox of God's Kingdom. We are in it now but also not yet. In this sense we might say we are citizens of the new Jerusalem already, but also citizens here on earth. An uneasy tension but a necessary one.

The new Jerusalem is a vision before us, a quest and a goal, but more importantly, a gift. It is not something we can make nor something we can build but a gift from God coming down from heaven.

+Chris