

Jan. 1, 2012
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
The Rev. Roger D. Patton
“The Holy City”

Psalm 8:

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established, what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air; and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Revelation 21:1-6

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”

And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

Welcome to the new year. This is the first Sunday of the month when we traditionally celebrate communion. Communion means that we practice the real presence of Jesus Christ. He was born as a baby, grew up to heal, preach, die on the cross, rise from the dead, and through His Holy Spirit become available for all flesh. The Psalm says the dwelling of God is with human beings, and the Revelation passage says the same thing. In communion this is illustrated through our receiving into ourselves bread and wine, whereby we become one with Christ and He with us.

In one of John Updike’s novels, he reflects, “In general, the churches bore for me the same relation to God that billboards did to Coca Cola. They promoted thirst, without quenching it.” This is the eternal problem of the church. By our very existence, our services, and our stained glass windows, we advertise that there is a God, but somehow we miss when it comes to helping people relate to God.

Christianity has become almost a cliché in our culture, something warm and fuzzy, what the author of James called “dead faith”, faith without works.

Christianity teaches that God is here in this place, hearing our prayers, talking to us through our minds and hearts, loving us with an everlasting love. Christ is alive, here in this place. And that means that we have a relationship with Christ, being forgiven and loved, and forgiving and loving others, no matter how difficult that can be. What we’re

doing this afternoon at the Hope Center, feeding hungry people with loaves and chili is part of what we're talking about.

Over 40 years ago, I was installed as pastor in New York City and Dr. James McCord, the president of Princeton Seminary, preached the sermon at that service. And he said that spirituality flows like a river from the throne of God and cannot be stopped. The verse from our Scripture lesson this morning says, "To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life." The implication is that the spring of water that God provides cannot be stopped.

Dr. McCord also said that day that the throne of God represents justice here on earth. That was in 1969 in the midst of anti-Vietnam War protests and civil rights marches. Again the implication is that spirituality comes when justice is not compromised. At that time it was civil rights and peace. What is it today?

The challenge to the church is to be more than a billboard advertising the existence of God, but to keep spiritual waters flowing from the throne of God into the hearts of human beings. The holy city is letting the glory of the lamb pervade the whole person because God is here. This is the city of God.

Our task is to enter that city. The choice is between just looking on the outside and saying, "Oh, yes. There is a God," and perhaps feeling safe. But the alternative is to enter our mind and soul into the city, and to begin to walk with God in the pursuit of justice for all people.

The way we do that on a communion Sunday is to reach out and take bread and cup and receive into ourselves the Holy Spirit. Spirituality flows like a river from the throne of God and his justice through dining with Jesus Christ at His table. And receiving the spiritual as a gift from the spring of the water of life, Jesus Christ. Christ is here in this place and in this time. Waukesha is a city of people, but it is also a city of God because God is present. We live in a resurrection world, made very different because Christ was born, lived, died, rose again, and is here now.