*What Will I Give to the Thirsty?*

Revelation 21:1-6

What is life all about? What direction do we have as human beings? Where is the course of human history headed? Nowhere in scripture is the future of humanity so beautifully and simply put as in the book of Revelation. Hear these incredible words of John in his vision on the Island of Patmos as prisoner.

Perhaps most of us have dreamed of the perfect place to live. I wonder what that might look like for some of you. Perhaps it’s the dream house of your life, perhaps a place in a city or in the pastoral country side. Maybe it’s the place you live now, or in the plans you dream of building. Perhaps it’s a big house, or a cozy one of peace and security. For some it gets to be a place of being cared for, having friends surrounding them. But nothing compares to the description of the New Jerusalem, the city of God come down to earth where God himself will dwell among His people, a place where there will be no tears and people will know God on a level they have never done so before. The ultimate goal of human existence is to dwell with our creator in new and complete understanding.

The New Jerusalem is not a brand new place, but it is a place where all things are made new. All things are recreated the way God wants them to be created, the way God intended them to be. It is like we started in a Garden, full of innocence, where walking with God and conversing with God was a natural thing to do. We kind of messed that up, got ourselves unable to live in the garden, distanced ourselves from God and have been searching for God ever since. We tried to do things our own way, not God’s way and continued to mess things up. The world kept getting a little screwy and at times it seemed that it would never be right again. Even when God gave us Jesus, we still haven’t seemed to get it quite right. But we have been given the opportunity and gift of Jesus to keep working with God to get this world right. But, if anything, we have learned that we simply cannot get the world right without our creator. Jesus draws us close and gives us insight into how we are to live. And at times we do get it. We do the right things and we at times experience what it is that we are meant to be and do. God, in his infinite patience keeps working with us to get us readied for the New Jerusalem, the very city that will be even better than the Garden, a place where we will know for sure that we are right with God and right with each other.

This New City will be a place without the chaos of the sea which will be replaced with a spring of living water. Thirst will be a thing of the past. But most important will be the sense of at oneness with God, an extreme peace and sense of being filled with God’s goodness. What a description we find in this passage about the purpose and direction for humanity. And we believe that someday it will be so. If we read these words correctly we find that this city is not a city where people live as separated from one another, but live in a unique and ultimate community that shares knowledge of God and relationship with God. What a grand dream.

We are intended to live that way here and now and experience that kind of community in the community of faith. We are intended to get a foretaste of the New Jerusalem where people of faith are gathered in places of worship, in homes, in places where people proclaim the majesty and power of God and where Jesus is proclaimed Lord and Savior. It is from communities of faith that we are intended to get a taste of what it will be like to be in right relationship with God.

Unfortunately our places of worship become places where we misplace God and dwell on maintaining buildings and facilities over and above maintaining our faith, and above growing our relationship with God. When we focus more on maintaining what we have and lose our desire to see God in this world, we lose sight of the ultimate goal of humanity and even lose our hope that the world will someday be that which God intended it to be. We run around with self-focused lives making wrong turns, losing clear sight of whose we are and trying our best to patch broken fences.

But the good news is that God doesn’t give up!!! God keeps plugging away with us, soul by soul, prayer by prayer, inspiration after inspiration as we plod our way through faith experiences, seeking to understand and grow. At times it seems that we get nowhere, that we take two steps back instead of one step forward. But we keep working at it. We keep trying to get it right. We keep seeking God. And we keep having those moments when it feels right with God.

Just when life seems disorganized, unproductive, chaotic God gives us a glimpse of the New Jerusalem, lets us taste the living water from the stream of life and sets us back on course. That’s the beauty of faith! Paths are being continually made straight, our faith is continually growing and God never gives up on us. And our faith community continues to grow, to produce glimpses of what the New Jerusalem community will be like.

The New Jerusalem is intended to be a here and now experience with glimpses of what that will be like as we live our faith, as we pray for ourselves and others, as we do God’s will in our interactions with each other. Ours is a living faith, one that is not intended to remain static. In this world we are never really all there in the New Jerusalem, but someday we will be. It is difficult to keep our relationship with God right, but someday it will not be. We are not good at being in perfect relationship with each other, but someday that will be a possibility. But for right now we are capable of catching glimpses of God’s dream, we are capable of catching sense of what that will be like. We do that in following our Lord and Savior, in doing God’s will. In loving God with our whole hearts and minds.

We do seem to live in a world where that perfect dream seems to be so far away and we wonder if we will ever get there. But God is faithful and keeps moving us in that direction. And we are part of that dream and part of fulfilling that dream by living our lives in faith, a faith that really matters, a faith that is alive and active and dynamic, a faith that is willing to understand that we have not reached a state of perfection, that we will continue to not do things right, but a faith where we understand and accept forgiveness and grace.

Faith that is alive and well understands that we are on a path that is set by God and nothing will destroy that dream of God for the New Jerusalem. Faith that is alive and well understands that we are imperfect at living the life God wants us to live, but God keeps nudging us forward even when we seem to be stepping backward. We are a people continuing to seek! We are a people in transition! We are a people of promise! We are a people of hope! We are a people who belong to a dream! We are a people who belong to God! And that is the only way to live and be!

Isn’t it time we remember where we are headed and renew the faith that gets us there. We cannot be content to simply come to church on Sunday morning, hear words that may be wise, or not, pray a little, sing songs that express our faith, and greet one another. Our destiny is to be in relationship with our creator, to acknowledge, love and serve our Creator. Through Jesus we know how to do that. Our faith is not a dead faith, but one that must continue to grow through paying attention to God, to conversing with God in the best ways we know. Ours is a faith that must practice the New Jerusalem here and now. We must practice it so well that others will wonder, “What is it that they know?” We must continue to drink from the spring of faith, be filled and renewed and go forth to serve God. Then, the world will be prepared for God to come down and dwell among us. The world will look to God as the source of all life. No more tears, no more heart hurts, no more destructive acts of terrorism and human caused disaster. No more fear and dismay and hopelessness. That is the way life was intended to be. That is the way it will be again. Just a pipedream? No, the future reality based on faith and the promises of God. And we can taste it here and now and ought to be tasting it in our communities of faith. How are we doing with that?