Sixth Sunday of Easter May 22, 2022

**The City of God**

The fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in the year AD 70 by the Roman army was the September-eleventh of the Jewish nation of the time, and more. For the Jews the city of Jerusalem, adorned by the resplendent temple, was not just one of the wonders of the world, it was the very house of the Almighty God. God Himself ordered the building of the temple, God himself dictated every detail of the structure and decoration of the temple. It was God’s one and only house in the whole wide world. The navel of the earth, the umbilical cord connecting creation to the creator was located in the temple in Jerusalem. And God swore an everlasting covenant to uphold His people (the Jews), his city (Jerusalem) and His house (the temple). The early Christians thought that the fall of Jerusalem would be the end of the world. The idea of having a people of God without the temple never crossed their minds until the temple actually fell and world did not end.

As we approach the end of the of the Easter season, the church takes us to the last vision of John in Patmos, a vision concerning the last things. There we see God being true to His promises as he restores the holy city Jerusalem and its temple. This restoration, however, does not take place in the manner that the Jewish people of the time expected it. First, we see that in place of the material city that was built from the ground up, we now see a spiritual city coming down from above, “**the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God**” (Revelation 21:10). Secondly, unlike the earthly Jerusalem with its irregular contours, the new city has a perfect square shape, four equal sides with three gates on each side. Finally, in place of the temple built with destructible brick and mortar, for the new city “**its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb**” (verse 22).

Seen against the background of Jewish expectations, John’s vision of the restoration of the holy city Jerusalem is saying two things. (1) God is always faithful to fulfill His word. When God says that His city is everlasting, God will see to it that His city is everlasting. Even when that city is utterly destroyed before our very eyes and all hope appears to be lost, God can always recreate the holy city out of nothing. This means that no matter how bad things may seem to be, in God there is always hope. What God has promised, God will fulfill by and by. (2) God does not always fulfill His word in the manner in which we expect it. We often expect God to fulfill His word to us in the material order, then God goes on and fulfills it in the spiritual order, and we fail to see it because we have our eyes trained only on the material horizon.

The visions of John in Revelation are a preview into eternity. There we see that God is true to his covenant promise never to abandon His people, His city, and His house. But God’s people, God’s city, and God’s house are now understood in a spiritual and not a material sense.

Many Jews at the time of Jesus failed to see the marvelous things God was doing in their midst because they were expecting God to act in one way and God was actually acting in another way. The problem was in their narrow expectations as to who could be the Messiah (must be a son of David!), where he could or could not come from (not from Galilee!), how the Messiah would appear (not through normal birth by a woman as a helpless baby!), and how he would liberate God’s people Israel (by defeating the Roman army of occupation). When God did it His own way and not their own way, they failed to get it. As Christians we fall into the same mistake when we allow ourselves to believe that God can use certain people and not other people, God can come into our lives in certain ways and not in other ways, God is in certain religious traditions and not in others.

Do you notice that in the new Jerusalem, there is no temple, no priesthood, no rituals, no laws, no religion? There is only God who is everything to everyone. May we never cease to wonder at the incomprehensible mystery of God unfolding before our very eyes in our world today.