

Reading: Revelation 22 v 1-7

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night.

They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

"Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll."

Preaching Notes:

During the lockdown I have found myself watching a lot more television. One of my favourite programmes is "The Repair Shop". People are invited to bring treasured possessions that are damaged and in a sorry state to be renewed by people with the expertise to bring them back to life. The request is that the origins of the treasured possession are left intact but that the beauty of the original creation is renewed. As I marvel at what is accomplished through the repair shop and their crafts people, there is for us a greater understanding of the word "Renewed". The work of the creator is not destroyed but that which was damaged is renewed and given new life.

As these thoughts came to me, I was reminded that God is our creator. At this time of year, God's creation is meeting autumnal days, fruit on the trees has ripened and is being harvested, conkers, acorns and leaves are falling and the beauty of our gardens is coming to an end. In a short while, all that has been vibrant and bursting with life and colour will be gone – not forgotten but waiting for the creator to bring renewal and new life next spring.

We have two apple trees in our garden, which we had high hopes of for a good harvest when we bought the house but last summer we had no apples from either tree. So, last January, we asked a tree expert to prune them. He pruned away all that hindered our trees from bearing fruit. This autumn we have had a wonderful harvest. The windfalls have been cut, cooked and frozen and the good apples stored for the coming winter. All this reminds me of Jesus talking to the disciples in John's gospel.

We read from St John's Gospel chapter 15 v 1-8. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will

be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

This passage from John's gospel is part of Jesus teaching discourse to the disciples after the Last Supper. They were all seated around a table, Judas has left them to betray Jesus. This was Jesus last opportunity to help his disciples glimpse what their future held.

Jesus uses the image of vines growing in a field. A common sight for them all. They would probably have watched or helped the farmer in the spring prune the vines. The branches that would not bear fruit later in the year were removed and burnt. So the image Jesus uses to illustrate what he wanted to say was not new, but helped his disciples understand what was needed to take them into the future. It was the imagery of God being a gardener and Jesus being a vine that was new. As a gardener, God cuts off every branch of the vine that will not bear fruit and these branches are then burned in a fire. Jesus then tells them that they must stay grafted into the vine, into himself, so that they remain in his love and care. Life ahead of them was going to be hard and if they were grafted into the vine, it would give the disciples strength and courage when life gets tough and they are tempted to give up and move away from the love and protection of the gardener, from God. Jesus needed the disciples to continue his work when he had left them to bear fruit. This would only happen if they were grafted into the spirit of Jesus.

As we look at these verses we are reminded that we are also God's creation. Unless we are grafted into Jesus we cannot be fruitful. We will not have the strength to be disciples, on our own, in today's world. There are too many temptations all around us that draw us away and lead us into sin. We become tarnished and broken and fall short of what God our creator asks of us. Where is our repair shop? We need the gardener to prune us from our shortcomings and sin. We are still God's creation and he knows we can be renewed and bear much fruit.

From that Upper Room, where Jesus had shared with his disciples his inner most thoughts and concerns for his friends, he left to be flogged, tried and crucified. Many of his disciples ran away or denied knowing Jesus but they still remained in the vine, still remained grafted into Jesus. They needed to experience Jesus death and their failures to fully understand what resurrection and new life meant, of what it was going to be like to bear fruit. Being pruned and then grafted into Jesus, they were open to be filled with the Holy Spirit. From the day of Pentecost onwards the disciples went to dangerous and hard places to spread the message that all God's creation can be renewed.

This passage from John's gospel lays the foundation for our passage from Revelation. John a servant of Jesus Christ was on the island of Patmos and he receives a revelation from an angel – a prophesy about the future. John writes down all that he experiences through the gift of the Holy Spirit sent to him by Jesus. Our verses come at the end of the book, which had been a reminder to the churches and all those who read John's words, that they must live with the future, the end time as their goal.

Chapter 22 describes how wonderful the end time, the new heaven, was going to be. The sin and strife of the world would be taken away. The very presence of God and Jesus would be there sat on a throne from which pure, life giving water would flow. This water was the water of life, the renewal of baptism giving life to all creation. The trees that bordered the river would bear good fruit every month, no matter what season, and the leaves of these trees were for the healing of the nations. In the presence of God and the Lamb, all will be as it was at creation: pure and unblemished. We shall be in the presence of God. We shall see his face and walk in his light. We will be renewed as we were at our birth: a new creation. How do we get there, what will our journey be like, will we be accepted? With God as

craftsman creator, all our brokenness and sin will be taken away and we will be renewed. Our lives will be grafted into Jesus. This will keep us faithful to our calling. Our journey will take us to places where we will be challenged by new people, who will ask about our faith and belief in God. How we answer depends on our renewal, our new life given to us through the Holy Spirit. Where is our ultimate journey taking us to? The places described by John in the book of Revelation? A place where we will find acceptance, forgiveness and where we are loved and free. A future, a time beyond our time, when we meet God face to face.

Our prayer is that as we are repaired and pruned, we find renewal and all that separates us from God disappears as we walk into a future with joy and love. This can only come from knowing Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour of our lives.

Amen.

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