

Sixth Weekend of Easter (RCL/C): "Awash in God's Grace"
Ezekiel 47:1-12; Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5; John 14: 23-29
May 24-25, 2025
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Water pouring out of a building is never a good thing, right? I've heard stories from insurance renovation friends about summer houses that suffered burst pipes while vacant in the winter. Often the problem was first discovered by neighbors who called the police after seeing a stream of ice flowing down the home's front steps. We just don't expect water to be exiting a building without a pipe.

Enter the 47th chapter of the book of the prophet Ezekiel. It's not one of this weekend's assigned readings, but it really should be ☺. It talks about Ezekiel's vision of water pouring from the Temple into the streets of Jerusalem, flowing faster and deeper as it goes. I thought of it when I read this verse from today's Revelation passage: *"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, through the middle of the street of the city."* (Rev. 21:1-2a)

In Ezekiel's vision he's accompanied by a man who leads the way, from the Temple precincts where the flood of water begins, through the streets as the water becomes ankle-high, knee-high, waist-high, until finally Ezekiel writes, *"By now it was a river over my head, water to swim in, water no one could possibly walk through."* (Ezekiel 47:5) He wouldn't just be **tiptoeing** through living water, he'd be doing the **breaststroke**! Ezekiel is told that this holy river flows out of the city, through the desert, into the Dead Sea, desalinating it, making it alive with plants and fish, transforming it into a fisherman's paradise! (Interestingly, the man tells Ezekiel the swamps and marshes will remain salty. This is because salt will still be necessary for preserving and seasoning food, including food

offered in the Temple.) **So powerful:** God's presence heals the nation of hurts brought on by sin and heals the land of its wounds, making fertile all that was barren, providing abundance in place of scarcity, and making the desert bloom, as we read in Isaiah and hear during Advent.

The **presence** of God, the **glory** of God, is the source of living water in Ezekiel **and** in Revelation. In Ezekiel's vision the water flows from the Temple because that is where God is believed to live, in the Holy of Holies. Although Ezekiel and the people of Israel are in exile, suffering the Babylonian Captivity, he prophesies a release from exile, a return to Jerusalem, when God will be at home again in the Temple, and living water will pour forth to restore the land and the people. Ezekiel recorded this prophesy that we just heard echoed in the Revelation reading:

On the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing. (Ezekiel 47:12)

I think of this as the "fruit of the month club" verse, but most wonderfully, 700 years later it becomes this magnificent vision from Revelation:

On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:2)

And how **all** the nations, not just our own, not just Ukraine, Palestine and Israel, South Sudan and Myanmar, **need** that healing, now more than ever!

I've thought about this passage all week, and I hope you'll carry it with you, literally and figuratively, this coming week. (Remember, you can take the order of worship home, complete with the Scripture readings!) It's a beautiful reading about **living water** for a baptismal weekend like this one, when we receive Baby Bryce Michael into the Body of

Christ through Holy Baptism. It's also a powerful reminder that not just Bryce but **we** are **awash** in living water, in God's grace. As in Ezekiel's vision, this living water is so deep we are swept off our feet, can't even touch the bottom, and find ourselves swimming in the ocean of God's love, wherever we go. It's not just that our glass is half-full, it's not just that our cup overflows and we're "drinking from our saucer," it's that we are **awash** in God's grace.

It may not feel like it, but we **are**. There's so much that's **real** and **present**, of which we're **unaware**. I'm reminded of this whenever I turn on the Merlin birdfinder app on my phone when I take a walk. I get a list of all the birds the app identifies from birdsong as I stroll through the neighborhood. Inevitably I am unaware of many of the feathered friends around me. Sure, I see cardinals, bluejays, robins, house sparrows, song sparrows, mockingbirds, grackles and morning doves, but **who knew** there was a mute swan nearby this morning, a Cape May warbler, a short-billed dowatcher, a chimney swift and a blackpoll warbler?? I miss so much and can easily forget I am surrounded by natural wonder. In the rest of life, too, I miss so much and can easily forget I am awash in God's grace. The Holy Spirit is very busy all around me, and I confess that I can be downright oblivious at times.

What's **missing** in the heavenly city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from heaven to earth, the city that John of Patmos, the author of Revelation, sees in his vision? The temple! The temple is missing! There is no temple – *"for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb."* (Rev. 21:22) My commentator friend William Barclay has pointed out that if you compute the dimensions of the new Jerusalem, "...the city is built in the shape of a perfect cube, indicating that it itself is the Holy of Holies."¹ God is **everywhere**,

not limited to an inner sanctum in a physical sanctuary. Another author has explained the absence of a temple and the presence of the Lamb like this:

All of life is holy and God is present in the midst of the everyday, not only at special places and times, and all of the people of God are “priests.”²

The living waters of baptism **drown** the “old self” saddled with original sin, even in one so young as Bryce Michael. This is why we say the baptismal font is both a **tomb** and a **womb**: the tomb of the old self that wants to **serve** itself, and the womb of the new creation in Christ. In Holy Baptism we receive a new identity of prophet, priest and king – **prophet** to proclaim God’s word, **priest** to intercede before God for the world, **royal relation** of the King of all the universe. This is why we can say we are a priestly people, set apart for the praise of God, set apart for service as God commands and as God empowers.

In our Gospel this weekend Jesus promises, *“Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”* We don’t have to wait for the heavenly Jerusalem to come to earth for *“...the home of God [to be] among mortals.”* (Rev. 21:3) When Jesus died on the cross, the curtain in the Temple was torn from top to bottom, letting us know the cross bridges the distance between God and us. Because of our baptismal sharing in Jesus’ death and resurrection, we are awash in God’s grace, deputized to be God’s agents of healing in this world, until that day when *“there will be no more night [and we] need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be [our] light....”* (Rev. 22:5) *“Come, Lord Jesus!”* (Rev. 22:20) Sweep us off our feet, dear Lord, in a divine flood of grace.

¹William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, vol. 2 (Daily Study Bible series, rev. ed., Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 215.

² M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation (Interpretation)*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), p. 218.

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