

Easter 6C 22 May 2022
Revelation 21:10,22 – 22:5
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth
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Grace to you and peace from Jesus Christ, who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

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. On either side of the river is the tree of life . . . Let's pray:

In the beginning, there was a tree of life in the midst of the garden (Genesis 2:9). In the centre of the new paradise, the perfect paradise of God from which his saints will never be driven, there's also a tree of life. The language is figurative and provides an image of our Lord Jesus Christ, the tree of life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is life for his own living people. He's our all in all; and he alone sustains our spiritual life. Jesus Christ is our tree of life and he wants us to come and pick the fruit, eat, and live forever.

First, I'll address the tree of life in the winter with no fruit on it; second, the tree of life in bloom and producing fruit; and, third, the way to partake of this fruit.

JESUS CHRIST, THE TREE OF LIFE IN THE WINTER.

This describes Jesus in his sufferings, in those dark wintry hours when he hung on the cross, bled and died; when he was mocked; when he cried out, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" ["My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (Matthew 27:46)?]; and was made sin for us, so that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Corinthians 5:21). Saints, we can't properly contemplate the tree of life without first looking at the cross. It was there that this tree gathered strength to produce its subsequent fruit. It was there on the cross that we say Jesus Christ obtained power to become the Redeemer of our souls; our Saviour.

Our Lord Jesus, the ever-living, the immortal, the eternal, became man, and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and died the death of the cross. He didn't die on his own account. He could have lived and not experienced death if he'd so willed. Jesus committed no offence, no sin.

Yet, every pang on the cross, Jesus suffered for you and for me. Jesus bled; the Just for the unjust to make us right with God. He died for the sins of his enemies, for your sins and mine, that by his stripes we might be healed, and that through his wounds, reconciliation might be made with God.

It gets heavier. Jesus' death on the cross was an accursed death. There were many ways by which people died, but there was only one death which God pronounced to be accursed. He didn't say, "Cursed is he who dies by stoning, or by the sword, or by a millstone around his neck," but 'it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'" (Galatians 3:13). Jesus Christ could only die the death which God singled out as the death of the accursed. Be astonished, saints, that Jesus Christ should be made a curse for us. Admire him, love him, thank him.

Jesus' death was humiliating. Only slaves who were bought and sold in the market suffered this ignominious death. The Jews considered Jesus worthy to be sold as a slave and put him to a slave's death. And they added their own ridicule to scorn. Some passed by shaking their heads. Some stood still and sneered at him. Others sat down, smugly satisfying their malice and contempt. Jesus was made the centre of all ridicule and shame. He was the drunkard's song and even those who were crucified with him reviled him. All this, he suffered for us. Our sin was shameful, and Jesus was made to be a shame for us.

Beside the excruciating, physical pain, we must never forget the spiritual sufferings. We can't imagine the griefs and groans and sighs and heart-breakings and soul-tearings and rendings of the spirit, which Jesus had to endure in order to redeem us from our iniquities.

The combination of these things is ghastly, which ought to burden our hearts in the form of grateful affection.

Jesus' death is the only hope for sinners. His wounds are the gates to heaven. The suffering of our precious Emmanuel is the only acceptable sacrifice for human guilt. Look to Jesus and be saved. Because you are in him and he is in you, the powers of hell won't prevail against you. Jesus' tears can cleanse us; his blood can purify us. His broken heart merits heaven for us. Just as you are, without one plea but that Jesus bled, come to the tree of life and live.

THE TREE OF LIFE IN BLOOM AND PRODUCING FRUIT.

Now Jesus stands in resurrected glory! The same Jesus is now clothed with honour instead of shame, able to save those who come to God by him. This tree, Jesus, now bears "twelve kinds of fruit"; - daily bread. All necessities for humans are to be found in Christ. All kinds of mercies for all kinds of sinners; all kinds of blessings to suit all kinds of needs. There's nothing in Jesus that we can live without. There's nothing about Jesus that's not essential. He satisfies every need. Satisfying, plentiful, sweet food, for all the needs of every soul. Manna was the bread of angels; but, "Never did angels taste, above, Redeeming grace and dying love" (Hymn - *In the Sanctuary*, Isaac Watts, 1707, Tune: HAMPTON). The flesh of God's own Son is the spiritual food of every heir of heaven.

From Jesus we receive our drink also. Christ's blood is the wine of his people. The atonement which he perfected by his suffering and death is the golden cup from which we drink, making our grieving souls glad and our fainting hearts refreshed. Jesus gives us the water of life, without money and without price (Isaiah 55:1). Jesus, the tree of life, yields us both food and drink.

Clothing too. Adam went to the fig tree for a garment to cover his nakedness. But we come to Christ and find a robe of righteousness - matchless in beauty, generous in proportions; one which will never wear out and makes us glow, even as Christ himself.

And medicine. 'And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.' Lay a poultice of Jesus on any wound and it will heal. One leaf from this tree, one promise from his lips, one word from his Spirit, one drop of his blood; Jesus is heaven's balm.

Children of God, stay in Christ and you'll have all you'll ever need. Shelter beneath his branches and the tempest will do you no harm. Heaven and earth would sooner pass away than a soul be lost who seeks refuge beneath the boughs of this tree. The lover in Solomon's Song says, 'With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste' (Song of Solomon 2:3). With Christ, there is comfort, joy, peace, and liberty; and when trouble comes, he will protect you.

Jesus is the tree of life yielding twelve kinds of fruit, always ripe and always ready, free to all who desire them, with leaves "for the healing of the nations." There are enough leaves for the healing of all the nations that will ever exist. The sweet fruit of Christ's love is always available to refresh you and satisfy you.

HOW TO GET THE FRUIT OF THIS TREE OF LIFE.

This is the big question that many people rarely consider, until they face the inevitability of their own death. It's humbling to witness, amidst the hustle and bustle of a hospital ward and the moaning and groaning of discomfited patients, the power of The Lord's Prayer to command attention. There's something so comforting, tangible, and live giving about Christian faith.

Access to the fruit of the tree of life is by faith. Faith is the hand that picks the golden apple. Do you believe? Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that he died on the cross? Do you believe that as a result of his sufferings, he is able to save? Do you believe that he will save you? Do you trust him with your life? If so, you are saved. If your soul comes to Jesus, and says, "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24); that's faith.

Saints, never think that your sins are so deep that Christ can't piggy-back you over them. If necessary, he'll carry you through hell and high water to keep you safe. Don't be afraid. Trust Jesus for he is the tree of life that spans the river and the water is his life-giving love. Rest in his shade and all will be well. Dear souls, rest in Jesus; he is faithful and true and you are saved! Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, the tree of life and river of love. Amen.