

Revelation 21:9-14, 21-27

“Come,” says the angel, “*I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.*” And he carries St. John away to a great high mountain and shows him a city, a beautiful city; gates of pearl and streets of gold. But there are no people in this city. Maybe that’s why it’s so beautiful. No people to trash it up...like out in San Francisco. No people to turn this holy city into a cesspool.

Yes, in fact our text declares that nothing unclean will ever enter this city, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false. No wonder people are missing from this city. For “*they are all unclean,*” the Scriptures declare. Everyone is unclean. Everyone does what is detestable and false.

But where does that leave us? For Revelation 21 is a picture of heaven in the future. And if we’re not there in that holy city, there is only one other place we can be...and not one we care to think about.

Since our text in Revelation describes the Bride, the wife of the Lamb in the future, it might be good for us to look at the same Bride in the past. And so we turn back the pages of Scripture from Revelation, and to whichever page we turn we see the Bride, the wife of the Lamb. But the Bride is less than perfect; not so beautiful.

Oh she has her shining moments. Abraham who believes God’s promise that he will have a son in his old age, and his faithfulness in offering Isaac as a sacrifice on the mountain. Moses who obeys God and leads His people out of slavery. David who trusts in the Lord and slays Goliath. The disciples Peter, James, and John (he who pens the words of our text). They faithfully follow Jesus in His earthly ministry, and they carry His Gospel into all the world as apostles.

But keep turning the pages, and soon we see the ugly side of the Bride. Abraham fails to trust in the Lord, and he lies to the king of Egypt about Sarah his wife. Moses strikes the rock rather than obeying God by speaking to it. David commits adultery with Bathsheba and murders her husband Uriah. Peter denies his Lord three times. James and John ask permission to call down fire from heaven upon a Samaritan village. The beautiful Bride is not so beautiful anymore.

Let’s keep turning the pages, but not of Scripture; rather of our own lives, because you and I, too, are the Bride, the wife of the Lamb. This is what your baptism means for you. And when we turn back the pages of our life, we like to pause on those pages in which we really shine. We had a good day. We avoided the wrong and did the right. We were attentive in church. We helped our neighbor. We made a contribution. We like these pages in our past. We look a little bit like the beautiful city in Revelation 21.

But these pages don’t help us much. Just the opposite, they hurt us. They hurt us when this is who we think we are. The more we recount the good pages in our life, the less use we have for Jesus, for His Absolution, His Sacrament before us, His words of life.

Here’s the truth. The city we resemble is not the one in Revelation 21, the beautiful city, but Jefferson City after it was devastated by Wednesday night’s tornado. Have you seen the

pictures? Buildings demolished. Trees uprooted. Power lines strewn everywhere. Rubble in the streets. The massive tornado did all this in a matter of seconds. And this, too, is the destructive power of sin in our lives.

We attempt to hide this ugliness from others, even from God. But it's there. We are no beautiful city with gates of pearl and streets of gold. We are as far away from resembling the Bride pictured in Revelation 21 as we can be.

But do not despair. It is good not to be puffed up with pride, but have hope. Because one truth stands clearly. You are not just a bride; not just a wife. You are the Bride of Christ. You are the wife of the Lamb. And this is why there is hope for you.

He endured the ugliness of sin on the cross. The tornado of God's wrath was too intense to be measured by any man-made scale. But Jesus did not run when it came. He took it all for you and me, and for every sinner. This is why He tells His disciples in our Gospel reading, "*I have overcome the world.*" He overcame by suffering and dying on the cross. He overcame by paying the penalty every sinner deserves.

This is the one who calls you His Bride in your baptism. This is the one who claims you, not because of any beauty in you, but because He bore the burden and guilt of your sin - all those pages in your past that are so ugly that you are ashamed of them. But Jesus is not ashamed of you. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And you, dear friend, are His wife.

This is why you enter the city in Revelation 21. You are not so clean, nor am I. But you enter with Christ, pleading His blood for the forgiveness of your sins. His blood cleanses you. Jesus brings you into the city. He is the pearl gate through which you enter. He is your hope. There need be no doubt whatsoever in your mind that you will be in the beautiful city in the future because your future is in Christ.

But pastor, some will say, How do I know, as the text says in the last verse, if my name is actually written in the Lamb's book of life? Friend, do not let Satan fill your mind with such doubts. Instead look to your baptism. What God did there for you can never be undone. You were given eternal life in those waters; a life in Christ that never ends. Your baptism into Christ declares to you that today, and every day, your sins are forgiven; that you are clean in God's eyes, for you are joined to Jesus.

When sin grabs hold of you, when doubts enter your mind, shout to yourself, "I am baptized into Christ! I am His Bride. And my place therefore is with Him now in this life, and forever in that city in heaven!" You can live each day with such confidence and hope. You can look forward with joy to the city that awaits you, for you are the Bride, the wife of the Lamb. Amen.