

NOT AS THE WORLD GIVES

One time a Sunday school teacher was talking about the end of time; about Heaven and the Kingdom of God and the New Jerusalem. She told her class of youngsters about the "crowns of glory" that await people who believe. "Now tell me," she said at the close of the lesson, "Who will get the biggest crown?" There was a silence for a moment, then one bright youngster piped out, "The one who has the biggest head."

John's vision, the Revelation that occupies the very last pages of our bibles, has many interpreters.

The youngster in the story that I just told, probably knows as much as any of us about the shape of that which is to come, but from the Revelation of John we know this: we know that while there will be trials and tribulations and great afflictions at the close of the age, that God will win over them and Christ will reign triumphant. We know that sin and death will be no more and that Christ's glory will light up the universe and his love will light up every heart.

We know that the faithful will drink of the water of the river of life and that there will be nothing accursed anymore; that God himself will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

That is the consistent promise made by Christ when He walked upon this earth and when at the end, with His blood, He established the New Covenant, the New Testament, for the forgiveness of sins. And that is the promise which God testified to and upheld when He raised Jesus as the first fruit; the first born, from the dead. Have you ever asked yourself, what makes the people of God different from the people who are in the world? What makes us unique?

You know, don't you? It's because of *whose* we are and *who* we are. Not only are we supposed to live differently than those who don't believe; different things are supposed to happen to us; things which do not happen to those who do not believe. Eternal life is one of them. The victory of Christ is promised to those are faithful; to those who wash their robes in the blood of the lamb; to those who repent of their sins and turn to God for forgiveness and mercy.

Today I want to look at four other things that Jesus promised that he would give his disciples;

- things that make us different
- things that make a difference for us
- a difference for us here and now, and later for eternity.

Each of them is promised to us by Christ in today's Gospel Reading.

FIRST - As it is written in the 23rd verse of John 14, *Jesus has promised to us that if we love him and show that our love for him is real by keeping his word, that both He and the Father will come to us and live in us.*

That is the word of God.

The thing, which Israel longed for, as they wandered in the wilderness, will be ours.

God will not only dwell in our temples and churches as He dwelt on Mt. Sinai and in the Tabernacle. Christ will not only be present where two or three of us are gathered in his name; God will dwell within us; Christ will make his home in us. Christ will occupy that vacuum that seems to exist at the core of every person's life.

"Behold - I stand at the door and knock" said Jesus. "If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into them and eat with them, and they with me."

Think of the number of people who are searching for God; searching for meaning; searching for something which is more, something greater; and consider this, that if they only stopped their search and listened for a minute; if they only listened to the knock that is at their door, to the voice that is speaking to them; if they only stopped and turned to Christ, and got hold of what it is that He has done; got hold of the fact that God loves them and held onto His word with the same passion with which they look for happiness and for peace, they would find what they are looking for inside themselves.

Which leads me to **THE SECOND THING** that Christ gives us, which is His **Word.**

We find that word in the tradition of the apostles and in the Bible; and by one of the other gifts that Christ gives. We find it inside ourselves.

By keeping that word; by following it; by treasuring it in our hearts and showing it in our actions, we do our part to make the promises of Christ come alive in us.

By holding out our hands and taking into us the Word of God; the Word of Christ, we take into ourselves the living presence of both the Father and the Son.

Scripture teaches us that the Word of God is alive and full of power.

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory.

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, God said ***“Let there be light, and there was light”***. He said, ***“Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place and let the dry land appear; and so, it was!”***

What God utters, what God says, does not come back to Him empty or void. As we receive the word, we receive God. As we keep the Word, as we live the word, God lives in us and through us. His light is our light and our light is His light. His path is our path and our path is His path.

THE THIRD THING that Jesus gives us is the ***“The Holy Spirit”***.

“I have said these things to you,” said Jesus, ***“while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.”***

The Holy Spirit has a very special job. It not only teaches us all that we need to know, it reminds us of what Christ has said, and it convicts us of our sin. It points out to us what is good and what is bad and Lord.

The Spirit brings our intercessions, our prayers, our sighs too deep for words to God, and it brings God's word back to us.

Paul says that the Spirit is the seal and the guarantee of our faith. It is what bears to us the gifts of God for the common good of the body of Christ. It is what affects our union with Christ and with one another.

The Spirit serves as our advocate, and our comforter; our source of visions and our font of living knowledge.

The Spirit has a very special purpose and presence in our lives.

The Spirit works in the lives of believers every day; most times it works invisibly and silently, in ordinary ways.

But visions still do come to believers. Knowledge is still imparted. Comfort still poured out. God still communicates with us.

I have heard it said in this way.

Do people still have visions today? I believe they do. However, I also believe that some of us do not. Now that's not to say God doesn't speak to us through the Spirit. Rather than defining a vision just in terms of a very special visual revelation of God to a person to relay a specific message, I believe another way to look at a vision is to say a vision has occurred any time there is a "clarity of understanding." That is something a lot of us have experienced. Suddenly, in the midst of a decision, you simply know what to do. You don't necessarily know why you know it, you just do.

Listen to this example that I found as I was preparing this sermon. These are the direct words of the writer and having lived in downtown Toronto I can relate to this.

"This past Tuesday I was in Toronto for the day at a course. After the class was finished, in order to meet the person who would guide me back out of the city I had to walk a distance.

I decided to walk down Young Street toward Union Station. What an experience and an education that was! I saw things I never want to see again.

Ear-rings in parts of the body where I never dreamt of seeing them. I felt anything but safe the whole time. Yet, after about 2 blocks as I was thinking and learning about this strange other culture, the realization came to me that these people with their different ways were just as loved by God as I was. To them, I was the one with the strange ways. Jesus died for them, just as He died for me or for you. It changed the way I looked at them. I didn't understand them anymore than before, but I could look at them in a different light. I experienced a "clarity of understanding." A vision. The Spirit spoke. Even there, in downtown Toronto, Jesus is Lord. The gospel is at work. God is present. I didn't see anything or hear anything like what Paul describes, but it was a vision; a new way of seeing.

"A message."

A vision -

A sign -

A clarity of understanding -

A feeling

A still quiet voice within -

The Spirit functions within us and around us, bringing to pass that which is needed by us; bringing to pass what God has instructed it to bring to pass.

The Spirit also works in others; bringing to us, through them, the word we need; the counsel we seek; the sign we have been looking for.

The Spirit is a Spirit of power and of truth. It is given by God in the name of Christ to all who believe in him and seek to follow him."

THE FOURTH THING that Christ gives His disciples that makes them different *is peace.*

Jesus said, on the night he was betrayed, the night He would be taken from his disciples:

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled. Neither let them be afraid."

This peace that Jesus gives is the peace of assurance; the peace of knowing, and the peace of believing.

Jesus attaches His gift of peace to something very specific. He attaches it to His death; to His leaving this world, and to the new thing that this will make possible.

Listen to His words:

"You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you'. If you loved me you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe."

Jesus does not give us peace, nor anything else, as the world gives things to us. Jesus gives us peace and all his other gifts, as He gives us himself. ***He gives it forever.***

What we are given today by Christ is not gone tomorrow. It is not used up, finished, or brought to an end even though, to the foolish, it may seem to perish. When something is taken from us by Christ, as He himself was taken from us, it is taken only so that it can be given back again in an even better form in a better way. The peace of Christ is the peace of eternity, the peace of certainty, the peace of resurrection and the peace of everlasting love.

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled. Neither let them be afraid."

We don't know what the future holds, but we know who holds the future.

We can have peace; for in faith we know there is one who is returning for us.

Because of the resurrection, we know that we are not forgotten.

We know that there is *one* who has gone to prepare a place for us.

An African-American poet once put it like this:

There's a king and captain high, And He's coming by and by,

And He'll find me hoeing cotton when He comes.

You can hear His legions charging in the regions of the sky,

And He'll find me hoeing cotton when He comes.

There's a Man they thrust aside, who was tortured till He died,

And He'll find me hoeing cotton when He comes.

He was hated and rejected, He was scorned and crucified.

And He'll find me hoeing cotton when He comes.

When He comes! When he comes!

He'll be crowned by saints and angels when He comes.

They'll be shouting out Hosanna! to the Man that men denied,

And I'll kneel among my cotton when He comes.

The future holds much promise; but the greatest promise is this.

Where He is, there we will be as well.

Till that day He dwells within us, and among us

His word works upon our hearts.

His Spirit moves in our midst.

Love Him and Keep His word.

He will make you different and He will make a difference to you.

Amen