

John Sampson
"Walking in the Light"
Text: Revelation 21:22 – 27
Preached at KVCC
October 13, 2019

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer.

Amen.

The text we hear this morning, on a day when we gather together around this communion table, a day when we gather together as a congregation and celebrate the year that is coming to a close, and turning our sights to what the future may hold for us, is a text that we might think really doesn't have much to say about where we find ourselves this morning.

How did you receive this image of God living among her people in a city, of there being no night and no sun, of nations streaming into this city, and of the wicked being barred from entry?

Did you hear this story and think that if it had any connection to our world, the ordinary world we live in, it must be about the future? It must be a prophecy about what is to come?

There are many of those who follow the message and example of Jesus and understand this reading, which comes from a book called the Revelation or Apocalypse of John, as predicting the future, of describing what God, and something called the devil, and the people of the world will do at the end of time.

But the name of this book we read from this morning already signals to us the possibility of another understanding of what we have just heard. The book is called the revelation, or the revealing, or the making clear of what might be hidden. Another way to understand this image of God living among her people, is to see it as revealing not the distant future, but the present now.

This story about God drawing to herself the people of the world by her own light, of not separating herself from her children by living in an inaccessible heaven, but being present right in the middle of where we live our lives, of privileging those who are life givers, instead of those who deal in the ways of death, is about right now, and about right here. The authors of this book of revealing tell us that all we have to do is open our spiritual eyes and we will recognize that we live in a world already transfigured, already sacred. We don't have to go anywhere, we don't have to wait. We've already arrived, and in fact, we've always already arrived.

And you already know this.

Two weeks ago during worship I invited all who were present to write down on slips of paper what worship means to you. What is this thing we do on Sunday mornings, and at other times throughout our lives? I collected your responses and transcribed them into a Word document and then fed that document into an app that creates something called a word cloud. The word cloud I created from the responses you provided two weeks ago is on the cover of our bulletin.

It provides a visual representation of the words, and concepts, that were most often referred to in your responses. The bigger the word in the word cloud, the more often it was mentioned.

The word that was referred to by most people when you answered what worship meant to you was God, or God's (possessive, not plural). It was mentioned about 45 times, far more than the next grouping of related words. This God, however we define what God is to us, forms the center of what it means to worship; God is the center of why we gather together here on Sunday mornings.

Think about that vision revealed to us in this morning's reading. Right in the middle of the city stands God. Right in the center of our community stands God.

And community is actually one of the next groupings of words that appear in our word cloud. Community, shared, together – these words that describe people coming into relationship with one another are identified 26 times. After being in relationship to God, the sharing of ourselves with one another is the most important part of what worship means to us. And again this truth is reflected in the vision we're given in today's reading. People from all walks of life are streaming into the city, into the community, and creating a place of connection. That's what is happening right here, on a day like today, among people like us. Our reading doesn't tell us about the future; it describes the present.

And we're told that the people who come into this city, centered on God's presence, are bathed in light. This isn't the physical light of the sun and moon; it is the light of spiritual and mindful illumination. Another grouping of words that appear in our word cloud, and describe what worship means to us, has to do with our own illumination. Meaning, learning, being able to reflect upon – this grouping occurs 25 times. We come together in community with one another, and in communion with God, seeking to elevate our lives beyond a simple material enlightenment. It is in a place like this, among people like us, in a spirit-infused activity we call worship, that we search for what it means to be human, what it means to be good, to share a vision of possibility and hope beyond the places in our lives, and in our world, that are broken, to learn how the physics of forgiveness and redemption could actually work in the here and now. We are drawn to worship by light. To phrase it another way, worship is our path towards enlightenment.

What is worship to us?

It's today.

It's something that happens around a table of simple food, at a church's annual meeting, where we vote on our budget for next year, and what we're going to do with the proceeds from this year's bazaar.

All these things can be worship, if God is at the center, and if we are together in community, and if we are drawn to the learning and searching for meaning, which is the path of enlightenment.

Welcome to the future. It's already here.

Amen.