

SERMON: 26 May 2019 – Rev Alistair Cowper

**“Realising the City of God”
(Revelation 21:10,22-22:5 and John 5:1-9)**

What an amazing picture of the future John’s vision paints. It’s such a source of encouragement for us to be given this in the Bible, and coming right at the end, it speaks to us assurance that in the end things can be good.

The glory of God will be seen, giving light to the city, and the nations of the earth will walk in its light, and the rulers of the world will bring their glory to it. Nothing evil will be allowed to enter.

There will be water, a pure river of life flowing from the throne of God, and the river will give life to the trees of life bearing fruit every month and the leaves will be used for the healing of the nations. Nothing will be cursed and there will be no night.

I think that just knowing this and believing it can transform the way we live now. Looking forward to what is promised gives us hope in the present. And because we get glimpses of heaven breaking through now we can grow in our assurance that what God has shown will come to pass.

C S Lewis said that what lies ahead is better than anything we leave behind in this world.

Life can be tough. People can get hurt. We all face loss at some point. Relationships break down. We do things we regret. Things are done to us which we didn’t deserve. We see unfair things happening to innocent people.

Some of these things don’t get fixed in this life. Which is why it matters that a day will come when all things are made new and justice and healing flow freely.

Jesus came to show us the way. Christ comes with a new word of life for a world broken by pain and suffering.

In the healing by the pool, Jesus speaks a word of new life to a man who’d been paralysed for 38 years, the same length of time Israel wandered in the desert on the way to the Promised Land. Are we supposed to notice that? Does it

matter? Does it mean anything? Is there a link between the man's healing and freedom from paralyzes and the people of Israel's healing and freedom from slavery?

Can we compare the man's blaming others for not being healed - he says there's no one to help him get into the water, and anyway someone else gets in before me - and Israel's complaining and grumbling in the desert, which prolonged their wandering and delayed their entry into the new life?

It always strikes me those words of Jesus to the man by the pool. "Would you like to get well?"

You feel like saying on the man's behalf, "of course. I'd like to get well, that's why I'm here!"

Why doesn't Jesus just go ahead and heal him?

Is it because he wants the man to want it for himself? God doesn't force himself on the man. Is God wanting the man to work with him, and relate to him? I think he might.

I think God wants to give us a new desire to seek God, to look for love, and discover healing.

It's interesting however that although the man doesn't actually respond and say he wants to be healed Jesus heals him anyway.

Maybe sometimes people don't even know what it is they need. Maybe sometimes people can't see beyond their current situation. Maybe sometimes there's a resigned to thinking this is as good as it gets so I better just make the most of it.

Trouble with that is that it often leads to grumbling and complaining or blaming others. It someone else's fault that I'm the way I am.

It's easy then to become bitter and once a spirit of bitterness takes root it can cause all sorts of harm to one's mental health and to one's relationships with others.

Which is why the hope of the Gospel is such a tonic in life. To know that Christ lives in us now and that we will reign with Christ in glory in the city of God spurs us on to good works. To know that the kingdom of heaven is breaking forth in the midst of this battered and bruised world inspires us. To know that death is

followed by resurrection gives us a hope and makes us prepared to undergo our own little deaths.

And to know that Christ is love planted in our hearts which looks for love in others, fills our lives with a sense of purpose and meaning and relatedness in the world.

It's God in us that loves God, and it's God in us that recognises God elsewhere. And it's God in us that assures us that it's all going to be ok.

This coming Thursday is Ascension Day when we remember that Jesus ascended in the clouds 40 days after his resurrection.

Jesus isn't further away now that he is ascended. Rather the ascension of Jesus confirms to us that God in Christ reigns over all things. And Pentecost means that Christ lives in us now in a whole life way that we couldn't have known had he not first died, been raised and ascended.

In John's vision, in the centre of the city is the throne of God and of the Lamb. It was John who called Jesus the Lamb of God. And it's there in the city at the throne that the servants of God will see God's face and will worship him and reign forever and ever.

What we see now is dim and unclear but now we've got a glimpse of heaven, a foretaste of the future; and we know a day is coming when we will see clearly the glory of God shining all around, in all things, all things, all things.