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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
May 22, 2022  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Easter

Scripture Lessons: Acts 14:8-18; John 14:23-29

Hymns: 11; 411:1-5; 614; 52

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Revelation 21:10-14; 22-23

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, <sup>11</sup>having the glory of God. Her light *was* like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. <sup>12</sup>Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: <sup>13</sup>three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.

<sup>14</sup>Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

<sup>22</sup>But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. <sup>23</sup>The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, the Lamb who was slain, and who lives forevermore, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Getting to your safe place.

It seems to be happening with some frequency this spring that regular programming is being interrupted for a special weather warning. If it is a severe thunderstorm warning or a tornado warning the weather reporter will lay out the expected path of the storm, and the hazard it likely presents and will encourage the people in the storm's path to seek out their safe place. It is to be a place that is in the basement, or an interior room without windows to reduce the chances that the people living in your house will be injured if the storm makes a direct assault on you and your home.

Now, how do we apply this to our spiritual lives? Let's begin with remembering what the book of Revelation is about and why it was presented by the Lord Jesus to the Apostle John. Times were challenging for Christians to say the least. Even John was exiled to an island named Patmos to limit his impact on the church. By all outward appearances the world was winning, and the Christians were getting a beating. Does that sound familiar?

The early Christians couldn't see Jesus among them. Was He still with them? Was He keeping them under His watchful eye and care? It is easy for us to feel the pressures of this world, to feel insecure in our faith. Maybe in our insecurity we keep our faith to ourselves, and maybe even sometimes slip into thinking like the world, conforming to the world, without even realizing it.

Those are some of the spiritual storms that assail us and would threaten us. We don't need a weatherman to tell us to get to our safe place. We just need to be reminded that the Lord Jesus who died for us and rose again and lives forevermore, has provided us with that safe place, and we are safe and secure. In our text we are presented with a magnificent picture of --

**THEME: The Holy City Jerusalem: Our Safe Place!**

As citizens of the Holy City Jerusalem, we are --

**I. Dwelling within Secure Walls.**

This whole scene was introduced to John by an angel telling John that he was about to be shown the bride of the Lamb, which is the Church. And so, we read how this was revealed to John.

*“And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, <sup>11</sup> having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.”* (Revelation 21:10-11)

In the vision John is taken spiritually to a great and high mountain. It’s a vantage point, a scenic overlook we might say, that John might be able to take it all in, because this is a great city. What makes it great is brought out immediately.

First it is the **holy** Jerusalem. Remember, the city is a vision of the Church of God, the believers of all time. It is made up of people who were sinners, who have been redeemed by Christ crucified, *“and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”* (Revelation 7:14) This is how we have been made holy, and this makes us safe from any accusations of sin, and from all condemnation.

This redemption also brings us into the glory of God! What word can describe this glory for us? Perhaps “dazzling!” The glory that we have is not ours but the glory of the Lord that shines upon us, and we dwell in His glory. This is our safe place! We are reminded of the words of Psalm 91: *“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. <sup>2</sup>I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust.”* (Psalm 91:1-2)

Our text continues: *“Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: <sup>13</sup> three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.”* (Revelation 21:12-13)

Now we are told of a great high wall. We don’t really have walled cities in our day and age. We don’t relate to this picture like the

early Christians would have, but we have seen enough in the movies to understand the picture. A good solid high wall was a great defense against the enemy that would seek to harm and kill the citizens of the city. It is that simple, we have a great fortress protecting us. Psalm 46 says: **“God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. <sup>2</sup> Therefore we will not fear, Even though the earth be removed, And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.”** (Psalm 46:1-2) This is our safe place whatever storms may come in this life!

The number twelve is used repeatedly with reference to the Church and God’s relationship with the Church. The twelve gates with three on each side of the great city remind us that we are ALL under God’s grace and protection. He has gathered His people from the north and the south, from the east and the west. We too are included in the holy city Jerusalem.

The twelve angels standing guard at the gates is a wonderful assurance of safety for the child of God in this life. It may remind us of the angel that God posted at the entrance of Eden so that no one might enter and eat of the tree of life and live forever in this corrupted life form. However, here we might take this in a little different way. The angels guarding the gates prevent anyone or anything from entering into the holy city that might do us harm. Remember the promise of the Lord recorded for us in the book of Psalms: **“No evil shall befall you, Nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; <sup>11</sup> For He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you in all your ways. <sup>12</sup> In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.”** (Psalm 91:10-12)

We are in our safe place and the mighty angels of God are standing guard to reassure us that the heavenly Jerusalem remains our safe place.

As citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, we are included among those --

## **II. Possessing the Securest of Relationships with our God and Savior.**

Again, we encounter the number twelve. *“Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”* (Revelation 21:14)

The foundations of the holy city are doctrinal. Our faith is founded upon a sure and certain truth revealed to us in God’s Word. Our faith is not built upon human opinion, or any social norms, or political correctness. It is absolute. It is built upon the revealed Word of God that has come to us through the apostles and prophets. Listen to how the Apostle Paul expressed this same truth for us: *“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> **having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,** <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, <sup>22</sup> in whom you also are being built together for **a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.**”* (Ephesians 2:19-22)

Our place in the holy city is based upon the truth of God’s Word, the truth of the gospel of a crucified and risen Savior, just as it was taught by the Apostles, and as it was received by them from the Lord Jesus Himself and the Holy Spirit. It is the truth that salvation comes to us through faith in Christ alone. So Peter declared to the Jewish council: *“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”* (Acts 4:12) We are secure in the truth of the Gospel of a crucified and risen and ever-living Savior. We have this truth in our hearts, and no one shall take it away from us, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it! (Matthew 16:18)

Our relationship with the Lord is rich and full. The closing verses of our text depict the fullness of this relationship. *“But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. <sup>23</sup> The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.”* (Revelation 21:22-23)

For many centuries there was a strong association in people’s minds tying Jerusalem with the temple. The temple was where people were to go to offer their sacrifices to get close to God. For

the early Christians to hear this announcement that in the heavenly Jerusalem there is no temple would have been astounding to them. Its significance for us is just as astounding as it was for them. We are told that the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. We no longer need a temple to bring us into close communion with God. This has been done for us through the all-atoning sacrifice that Jesus made in offering His life for us on the cross. And now that Jesus is risen from the dead and lives forevermore, we have an ongoing living relationship with God, a closeness, an intimacy that could never be achieved through a special building dedicated for the offering of sacrifices. Jesus promised us *“Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:20)

The impact this should have on our day-to-day life is significant. It is a message the apostles directed to us repeatedly. Paul wrote: *“Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. <sup>3</sup>For you died, and **your life is hidden with Christ in God.** <sup>4</sup>When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”* (Colossians 3:2-4) The Apostle Peter wrote: *“Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness.”* (2 Peter 3:10) We share in Jesus’ death and in His resurrection. Life is no longer ALL about the material and the here and now. Our life, the real heart and core of our lives, is already in heaven where Jesus is! So, let’s focus on this magnificent special relationship we have with the Lord. Peter encourages us to adopt a lifestyle that reflects what we know to be true, all the stuff of this life is passing away. We should be directing our manner of life appropriately, living in holy conduct and godliness.

And the Lord provides the light to guide us all along the path of life. In this vision of the heavenly Jerusalem there was no need for a sun or moon. All necessary light for life flowed from God and our risen and glorified Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus said, *“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”* (John 8:12) Jesus provides all the light we need to walk the path of life. We come short in no knowledge. We are not left in the dark in any way. Jesus is the Light of the world! He is our light, our security that shines in our hearts.

Paul wrote of this to the Corinthians: *“For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”* (2 Corinthians 4:6)

You see every necessary feature has been provided for us to be safe from all the storms of life. We may see storm clouds gathering in the distance, and they may look threatening indeed. The world does desire to roll right over us and bring their philosophy and morality to prominence. In this life, we shall always have the thorns and thistles of trials and tribulations that could also undercut our confidence in the Lord’s protection. Storms will come, of that we can be sure. But we have our safe place which the Lord has constructed for us. We are **in** our safe place! We are secure within the walls of the holy city Jerusalem.

**AMEN.**

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)