



Let us pray. (Silence) O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen* (BCP 291).

In John's vision as explored in Revelation, we need no artificial light because the glory of God is its light. We need no building as temple because our relationship with God is such an integral part of who we are that we become the temple. We need no doors or gates because life with God is so abundant that no one has need and thus we do not fear strangers taking from us. These are images of the kingdom of God come to earth. Remember the new earth and the new heaven are not up above us but rather have come down to dwell among us. There is no "bye and bye" – there is only now.

In Easter season – the time between Easter Day and Pentecost – we light the Paschal Candle at our worship services to specifically and intentionally remind us of Jesus' constant presence with us. This is the time that he walked with the disciples after his resurrection and before his ascension. The lit Paschal Candle reminds us that through God's love for humanity not even death has the last word.

In the Easter Vigil service, we hear:

Acts 16: 9-15; Psalm 67; Revelation 21: 10, 22-22:5; John 5: 1-9

Holy Father, accept our evening sacrifice, the offering of this candle in your honor. May it shine continually to drive away all darkness. May Christ, the Morning Star who knows no setting, find it ever burning – he who gives his light to all creation, and who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen (BCP 287).

Our Sanctuary Candle burns all year long. This practice comes from Exodus, chapter 27, when God instructs the Israelites to keep a candle burning eternally symbolizing the presence of God. Thus, we have candles as outward symbols of God's eternal and constant presence with us. We have internal symbols of that same presence in acts such as the marking with oil on our foreheads at the time of baptism. The light of God burns for and with us both internally and externally.

The vision of John also includes other symbols of our faith: the river of the water of life, which we talked about last week when I challenged you to consider whether your faith was more like cement or like water. We baptize with water and in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We die and we rise to new life through the water of baptism. True faith flows like water into every part of our life until our faith becoming life-giving to all with whom we come into contact.

And then John tells us about the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month. It reminds me a bit of the "Fruit of the Month" Club from Harry & David that was a big part of my family's life growing up. We always got pears at Christmas and grapefruit from Florida in January and peaches in August. Each month we waited in anticipation for the sturdy box to arrive and be opened so we could share in the luscious fruit. Our lives were enriched through the gift of monthly fruit. Even though my parents knew what fruit was coming each month, as a child it was a surprise- and I especially wanted the peaches – big as your hand and dripping with juice and goodness.

John's vision of what will come to be when God's realm is reality on earth is like that. No artificial light needed. No gates or barred doors are needed. Water flows and satisfies any parched bodies. Trees provide life and shade. Nothing accursed will be found.

The trees have multiple roles to play. Besides producing fruit each month, the leaves are for the healing of the nations. Our divisions and divides will cease to be as the Word of God is bound upon our foreheads and our hands, echoing Deuteronomy, chapter 6. And from Jeremiah, chapter 31, verse 33: "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." When our faith and trust in God is written on our hearts until it permeates everything we are and everything we do, then the kingdom of God moves closer to earth.

The phrase "show your true colors" apparently goes back to the days of ships fighting on the high seas.¹ If you were a pirate or privateer, you would fly the flag of a country such as Great Briton until you got close enough to the other ship to engage them and then you would lower the

¹ <http://idiomorigins.net/show-true-colors-origin/> (April 27, 2016)

Acts 16: 9-15; Psalm 67; Revelation 21: 10, 22-22:5; John 5: 1-9

flag of Great Briton and raise your pirate flag. Thus, the “true color” was that of a pirate and the previous flag was flown to lull the other ship into complacency so it could be boarded and robbed. Today, “show your true colors” refers to our true self not the self we may put forth in order to be popular. The true colors of the leaves of the tree of life are designed to help heal the nations until all come to believe in God and live in harmony with each other.

The funny thing is that the true colors of leaves on a deciduous tree are not only green. Yes, green is a color of leaves we see for most of a season but the true color of the leaves is also yellow, red, orange or brown. During the time from early spring when the leaves first bud out, we see that they are green. The leaves are taking in chlorophyll which is necessary for life and growth. It also helps with healing and promotes cleansing. Leaves that are green are necessary to a tree in its life.

Leaves begin to turn colors as the days shorten and as the days get cooler. The tree and the leaves no longer need the chlorophyll in the same way that they did earlier in the year. The chemical changes that result in leaves turning yellow, red, orange and brown are a delight to us even as they signal the ending of the season. Those red, yellow, orange and brown leaf colors are just as much a part of a tree as are the green leaves. A deciduous tree’s true colors include green, red, yellow, orange and brown. It’s only as we follow a tree throughout the year that we see the variety and the beauty in each color.

Perhaps this can be an image for us regarding the healing that we need to have happen in order to be part of the new heaven and the new earth. A reminder to us that God created all of us, whatever the skin color, or gender, or culture. John tells us that the purpose of leaves of the tree is to heal the nations.

Jesus asks the man waiting at the pool Beth-zatha whether he wants to be made well. The man had been ill for 38 years and could never make it first into the water when the healing spirit appeared. And so he remained for those long years looking at the water and wishing he could be first. Jesus asks him a critical question: “Do you want to be made well?”

It appears that the man had remained in sickness because no one would help him make it first into the pool. Jesus doesn’t ask the man where his family was or his friends. He simply asks: “Do you want to be made well?” And then Jesus tells him to “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” And the man does.

Healing of the man didn’t require another person’s intervention. Perhaps healing of the nations doesn’t require an outsider’s intervention either. Perhaps if we all really heard the question: “Do you want to be made well?” we too could stand, take up our mat and walk. Our healing needs may not be like the man at the pool in the sense of an outward physical ailment. Our healing needs may include the courage to show our true colors as a person of faith.

When we take the chance to live a life where we show our true colors, when we rest in the knowledge that God loves us, we can get up and walk. And the new earth and the new heaven come closer to earth. **Amen.**