

Revelation 22:12-17, 20 - You are invited! Easter 7 June 2, 2019

By Pastor Kenneth Mellon, Trinity Lutheran Church and School, Pleasant Valley Rd., West Bend, WI

God's invitation of grace and peace has been extended to you through Jesus Christ your Lord and Savior. John saw a vision of heaven that made him eager to see its coming in Revelation 22:12-17, 20. These are your words, heavenly Father. Open our eyes to the future through your truth. Your word is true.

Dear members anticipating the coming Christ,

How do you picture heaven? Brightness! Jesus is its source of light. There are millions of bright angels filling the sky. All believers are dressed in bright white reflecting the holiness and glory of Jesus. Beauty! We'll see our beautiful Savior at the center of God's throne. Heaven will have beautiful streets of gold and walls with foundations made of precious gem stones. There is a river of life and a tree of life that produces fruit for every season. Love! God is love and in heaven there is nothing to block His love to us. We will fully know His love and be able to express his love to him and others. Life! You will live to the fullest! There will nothing slow you down. Joy! There is a fullness of joy and nothing can take that away. Reunion! No more separations of people. All believers will join together in perfect unity!

There is no relationship or place on earth that can compare to heaven. Every believer thinking about heaven will want to be there! The good news is not only that heaven exists, but that it is for you!

You are invited!

Who wouldn't take His invitation? The angel described as "*blessed*" "*those who are have washed their robes and have the right to the tree of life*" (v. 14). It's hard to believe that anyone would not want to have such blessings. It's not that people don't want to be in heaven. But, most want to come there on their own terms. If you were invited to a national awards banquet with some of the most famous people in the country and you were offered the finest clothes to wear to match the kind of clothes that everyone else will be wearing, would you decide to come with cut-off shorts, a t-shirt, and flip-flops? You may try to come, but you won't get in! Jesus told a story of a king's banquet and the clothes offered for it.

Spiritually, too many people think that they are good enough to enter heaven on their own. They compare themselves to others who they think are worse or they think about the good things that they have done. Jesus said in verse 12, "*I will give to everyone according to what he has done.*" But Jesus wasn't talking about rewarding good behavior. He was describing how people who believe in Him will have their sins washed away by His blood and Jesus' own life will be credited to them. These people that Jesus judges as "good" also have true faith in Him as their Savior. Faith will show by their lives. Unbelievers don't have their sins washed away nor do they have Jesus' perfection to cover their sins. The wages of their sin will be death and eternal separation from heaven's glory to their sadness and shame.

This is described in verse 15. "*Outside (the wall) are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.*" The word "dogs" refers not to cute little house-dogs, but wild vicious dogs who roamed the country-side. The Jews referred to unbelievers as this kind of dog. In a sense you could say that Christians are tempted by the "call of the wild" to follow them into sin. Unbelievers are also described as working with satanic things, practicing sexual immorality without remorse, murdering people without a conscience, and worshipping idols of wood, stone, or of themselves. They follow the devil with lies and deceptions. What a difference God sees between those in Christ and this group of sinners living in rebellion against Christ!

2. We're tempted to let go of God's invitation. Jesus promised twice: *"I am coming soon!"* (v.12, 20) Christians have been waiting for nearly 2,000 years. That's a long time to wait for Jesus to "come soon." How many of us like to stand in long lines at a store to buy things? How many of us like to sit in long lines of slow moving traffic? We don't like waiting, but if the purchase is that good or the destination is that great, we'll be willing to wait. We know that nothing on earth can compare to heaven and all that Jesus will offer us there. So, we will wait eagerly looking and planning for Jesus to return.

The more difficulty for us is that the devil tempts us to replace Jesus and His saving Word with other things. The devil tempted Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit so they couldn't eat from the Tree of Life. What keeps us from God's saving Word? Is it work or sleep? Is it friends that keep us from having time with Jesus? Is it that we have indifference about our daily need for Jesus' forgiveness? Do we not realize the spiritual danger we are in by living away from the life-line of God's Word? Evil is so strong to pull us away into eternal darkness.

We will not give up trusting in Jesus' invitation. 1. Jesus is helping us. He said, *"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End"* (v.13). Jesus as God's Son is described in Hebrews as the author and the one who completes our faith (*Hebrews 12:2*). As we connect to Christ through His Word and Sacraments, He will keep our faith strong. As the first and last, Jesus is the Lord of history. We can trust Him to guide all events for our good. Even as Jesus was there at the beginning of creation, so He will be there at the end of time on Judgment Day to save us from the fearful things that will happen. Jesus called Himself *"the bright Morning Star"* (v.16). That star appears at the break of dawn to assure people that another day is about to begin. So, Jesus assures us that our hope in Him will lead us to an eternal day in heaven.

We believers have another way to hold to the faith: to pray. John wrote, *"The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life"* (v. 17). The Holy Spirit is always speaking to God for us so He hears us pray the right words. He is also working in our hearts so that we daily hope for the Lord to return. He creates a thirst in us and assures us that as we seek Jesus' forgiveness and love, we will be filled! Jesus Himself gives us this witness through His Word, and we are certain that His Word is truth.

The last reason that we have to hold on to God's saving invitation is so we can help others. Jesus wants all to know the truth. That is why He had John write about the visions in the book of Revelation. Jesus wants all people to wash away the sin in their lives with His forgiveness. He knows that all people are spiritually thirsty for God's love and for the joy, the beauty, and the perfect life that heaven offers.

Jesus died for everyone. He wants all to be saved. He has given us the privilege to speak to people close to us. We can invite them to come to worship or fellowship events or bring their children to the baptismal fount to have their sins washed away by Jesus. We can invite them to come to our outdoor church service and picnic this summer to hear the Word of God. We can invite them to come to vacation Bible school that children may learn the saving truth about Jesus. We can invite children to come to our Christian school or adults to come to an instruction class so that they learn about the amazing grace of God in Christ.

Heaven is such a beautiful, loving, life-teaming, and joyful place! Never consider the word "no" as an answer to Jesus' invitation to come. All is prepared. The glory of heaven awaits. Come, for Jesus promised, "I am coming soon." We respond: *"Come, Lord Jesus. Amen."*