

Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 6, 2018

Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM

Revelation 21:21-27 The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass.

22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. **23** The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. **24** The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. **25** On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. **26** The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. **27** Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

“Right with God”

Wish lists aren't just for kids with upcoming birthdays. We all have them, even if we don't write them down. Wishes for a beautiful yard or new patio furniture to enjoy our warmer weather. Wishes for a new wardrobe or a new vehicle. Maybe just wishes for everyone in your family to stay safe and healthy for a change. We each have wishes that are unique and personal to us.

Some wishes, though, are wishes we have in common. We have some hopes and dreams that we share with God. We want them and God wants them for us. As we've been taking a journey each Sunday through selected verses from the Book of Revelation, we have lots to look forward to as Christians. And yet God has so many blessings in store for us right now. From Revelation 21:21-27 we see that we are right with God. We have a right relationship with God. So that means we will enjoy an eternity right in God's presence. Right with God means we are present with God in his presence enjoying his presents for us.

In 2013 FOMO was added to the Oxford English Dictionary. FoMO stands for the fear of missing out. If you aren't familiar with that phrase, you are still probably acquainted, possibly intimately acquainted with the concept. One study defines it this way: “the uneasy and sometimes all-consuming feeling that you're missing out – that your peers are doing, in the know about, or in possession of more or something better than you.”¹ People who study this sort of thing suggest that it starts with a sadness over what is going on in your life. It leads people to check social media over and over again. We wish we could be doing what they are doing. Seeing everyone's amazing posts about all the interesting and exciting things they are up to just deepens the sadness and make you feel more left out. It puts a person on a hamster wheel of unhappiness.

¹ Eric Barker. “This Is The Best Way to Overcome Fear of Missing Out.” Time Magazine, June 7, 2016. Accessed at <http://time.com/4358140/overcome-fomo/> on 03 April 2018.

While I'm not an expert, I don't think it comes from a deep seated unhappiness or an addiction to social media. It's probably just something more basic than that. It's just part of being human. And it's not just from all the cool things out there, but some of it actually comes from a real blessing. The Book of Revelation gives us some amazing pictures of what it will be like for believers when we arrive in heaven. And Jesus does that with a good purpose in mind. He wants to give confidence to believers while they are going through challenging times. When the Apostle John put pen to paper, Christians were experiencing severe trials and persecution. They needed to know that they wouldn't be defeated. In the end, Jesus gets the win. And because Jesus wins the ultimate victory, his people will share in his triumph.

And yet, if you're like me, you can't help wishing you could have that victory and enjoy those blessings right now. Especially when we soak in this picture of our heavenly existence that starts with this description: **"The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass."** (Revelation 21:21) Jesus is promising an eternal existence right in God's presence.

Fear of missing out happens when we are more preoccupied with what is going on in someone else's life that we actually risk missing out on good things in our own lives. When you think about what is going on in heaven for those believers who are already in glory, when you look at other Christians and see some of the things God has given them but withheld from you, when you think of all the unanswered prayers in your life or prayers that have come back with a "no" answer from God, when you feel like you are just struggling to keep your head above water in your life of faith, any of those things and all those things take their toll. Maybe it doesn't put you on a hamster wheel of fear of missing out. But you can't help feeling a little cheated by God. At least for now.

There's actually a good reason why you probably feel far away from God. One Bible scholar describes it this way: "When man fell, various divisions took place. The first and basic division is between man who was revolted and God. All other divisions flow from that. We are separated from God by our guilt — true moral guilt... yet it is quite plain from the Scriptures and from general observation that the separations did not stop with the separation of man from God...secondly, man was separated from himself. This gives rise to the psychological problems of life. Thirdly, man was separated from other [people], leading to the sociological problems of life. Fourthly, man was separated from nature."²

That insight helps explain some of the uncertainties and unhappiness in life. There are some legitimate reasons for having a fear of missing out. Disappointments with people. Anxiety over what I've done. My own poor performance causes real fear that I could miss out on God's blessings. It's a bit scary to see who is part of this glorious vision of heaven: **"Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life."** (Revelation 21:27) My own failure to love God and love the people he's placed in my

² Francis A. Schaeffer. "The God Who Is There: Speaking Christianity into the Twentieth Century." Inter-Varsity Press: Downers Grove, Illinois; 1968. p. 152.

life show me how unfit I am. Knowing my own thoughts have been defiled, knowing my desire for the life someone else has, my lust for their blessings show how unworthy I am. Deceitfulness between what I want people to think about me and what I really feel inside. Lies cause me to prioritize some Bible teachings because they are more convenient than others.

Even the times when I feel I have an edge over someone else makes me question my inclusion in the Lamb's book. Shameful contempt comes into my mind when I think about the people who can't get their act together. Infuriating thoughts in my mind over people who claim to be Christians but don't even seem to be trying. I should be shut out since I've created my own god who fits better with my imagination and my desires. Real fears fill our hearts because of very real impurities in our lives.

God wants to share something with us. God wants to enjoy something real with us. But when people let us down, we can't help jumping back into our uncleanness. When we start to wallow in rejection and failure, those impurities come easier than glorifying God's name. When our hopes for happiness leave us feeling empty, we are vulnerable to the shameful and deceitful things we know we should avoid. It means we end up missing out on the hope God has for us. We are shut out by our own contaminations.

But God does want you to see this picture of Revelation is your home. You belong in the paradise he has created for you. But it is because of everything HE has done right to make you right with God.

That's something Kim Phuc Phan Thi learned the hard way. You might know her as "Napalm Girl" from the disturbing photo taken of her when she was just nine years old, capturing her running along a puddled roadway with her arms outstretched, naked, shrieking in pain and fear.³ Her own people, the South Vietnamese, had been bombing trade routes used by the Viet Cong rebels. Kim just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Even now, more than 40 years later, she still suffers from the pain of that bombing raid gone wrong.

But for Kim the emotional and spiritual pain were actually harder to endure. The religion she was raised in, Cao Dai (pronounced cow-die), recognizes all religions as having "one same divine origin, which is God, or Allah, or the Tao, or the Nothingness," or pretty much any other deity you could imagine. "You are god, and god is you"—was the mantra ingrained in her. When trouble came, she rubbed a charm in hopes the help would arrive. She continued to bear the crippling weight of anger, bitterness, and resentment toward those who caused her suffering. She craved relief that never would come.

That is, until she visited Saigon's central library in 1982. She was searching for answers. Searching for hope. So she just started pulling books of religion off shelves. After scanning through a few books on Bahai, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Cao Dai, she started flipping through a New Testament. In those pages she encountered a Jesus who didn't place the

³ Kim Phuc Phan Thi. "These Bombs Led Me to Christ" Christianity Today. April 20, 2018. Print edition.

burden of religious success on her weary shoulders, but was himself wounded and bore scars.

And that doesn't just apply to Kim. Instead of the darkness of hatred and bitterness and resentment, everyone who knows Jesus gets to enjoy his light. Because of Jesus, your name is written in the book of life of the Lamb. Because of the cross of Jesus, every spot and blemish has been wiped away, every unclean word and every impure thought has been removed from your record with God, every detestable thing and every abomination was shouldered by Jesus.

People who study the psychology behind the fear of missing out suggest the joy of missing out as a solution. Looking at what everyone else is doing prevents you from seeing joy in the life you actually have. Jesus gives you this joy. Jesus gives you a rightful home in heaven. You will not miss out on God's glory and God's blessings, because you have a Savior. Jesus has opened wide the gates of heaven for you. The pain over what you've done and the suffering over what has been done to you is replaced by the glory of God that shines without interruption or intermission: **"The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp."** (Revelation 21:23) You are secure and safe: **"On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there."** (Revelation 21:25) No night or the people trying to sneak around under the cover of darkness. No enemy, no hostility, no threat can get to you. You have a life where you get to walk in harmony with God in his glorious light.

This isn't just wishful thinking. Because Jesus makes you right with God, you will enjoy eternal existence right in God's presence basking right in God's glory. That's not just a promise for a far off future. Right now you get security and safety to take care of your uncertainty and anxiety. The purity and truth of your Savior lets you know you have a real relationship with your God. Right now in the present time the Lord is present with you. Right now because Jesus has made you right with God, you enjoy presents, gifts from your God. Right now. Right now you are right with God. Right now you can have certainty you will be right there at his side for all eternity. Amen.