

Glen Ridge Congregational Church  
May 25, 2025  
Scripture: Revelation 21:10, 22 – 22:5

## Its Gates Will Never Be Shut



"The New Jerusalem". Armenian manuscript by Malnazar and Aghap'ir in [New Julfa](#) bible, 1645.

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer.

Amen.

I have a confession.

I am a church geek.

I love the history and traditions and beauty of the church.

But even though I am a church geek, I also have a number of reservations about the history and traditions and beauty of the church.

One of the reservations I have concerns the lectionary, the church's schedule of readings that are suggested to be shared with congregations, just like ours, throughout the year.

And one of the reservations I have with it is that I often feel that the stories we hear are often told too quickly. We hear a story, and before we can fully dive into its depths – whoop! – we’re off to the next story.

I mentioned earlier that we are in the season of Easter, the season when the church, and the followers of Jesus, celebrate the resurrection.

But doesn’t Easter seem like a long time ago?

It was just a couple of weeks ago, but doesn’t it seem like it was months ago?

I know it does for me.

And it might seem that way to you too because so much has happened in the life of our church between now and then. We said goodbye to Pastor Rusty, we had a hymn sing, we welcomed Craig Peterson who is our Associate Conference Minister to preach, Sherry offered a great reflection on the femininity of the Godhead, and then just last week I led worship for the first time.

When was Easter?

Wasn’t that sometime last year?

The good news is that we are still in the season of resurrection, and there is so much more to learn about what resurrection is and might be.

Today, we hear a story from what I think is the oddest book in all of the Bible, the book of Revelation. And I think this reading we just heard is definitely an Easter story. But maybe it doesn’t seem that way. There’s no cross. Jesus isn’t mentioned. There’s no empty tomb. All of the signs we so often connect with Easter are missing. But perhaps in the reading we just heard our spiritual ancestors are trying to tell us something. Perhaps they’re sharing with us their insight that resurrection is a bigger gift from God than just one cross, and one body, and one tomb.

If you know anything about the book of Revelation you know that it is a story of the final engagement between God and the evil present in our world. It is a telling of the final battle between light and darkness. And it’s told in such strange imagery: there is a slaughtered lamb, and bowls, and trumpets and scrolls. There are fiery pits and a woman about to give birth who is chased by a dragon.

For some people this is a book of prophecy, which tells us in coded language what will happen sometime in the future. For many scholars, it is a moment where an early Christian community is saying symbolically what it can’t say outright. For others, those walking the path of spiritual transformation, it is an expression of the journey of the soul.

By the time we get to the vision we heard this morning the forces of darkness, whoever and whatever they might be, have been defeated, and God’s power of love and justice has won. And

now a new Jerusalem descends from heaven, and it is an amazing sight. Filled with God's presence and light, its doors are open and welcome all the people of the earth into it. There are trees of life offering their healing to the world. It is an image of paradise regained. It is an expression of our deepest yearning.

In all of the beautiful aspects of this vision, I have to admit, my attention keeps coming back to the walls and the gates of the city. Why are they there? Why, after all of the enemies have been defeated, why when a new Jerusalem is created and offered to humanity, do we still need walls and gates?

Why when Jesus is resurrected does he still carry the wounds which killed him?

I think it's because resurrection is not resuscitation.

I think it's because Easter is a power that doesn't restore what was. It transforms into something new.

I think it's because the new body that comes back, isn't the same one that hadn't yet been crucified.

I think it's because the body of the city always remembers its conflicts and the wars that engulfed it.

And these histories can never be erased, even if the city is restored.

The wounds will always be present, even if they no longer bring death.

In this time when I am getting to know you and you are getting to know me, I will share something I haven't yet shared with the wider community. I am a victim of physical and mental abuse at the hands of my father. And because of a number of experiences I had growing up I put up walls around myself for protection, just like the walls the ancient Israelites put up around their city to protect themselves.

I closed the gates of my heart to ward off the evil of my father, just like that ancient city closed its gates during its deepest night to keep out those who would bring it harm.

I share these things with you this morning not to bring attention to myself, or to ask for sympathy. I share them with you to proclaim that I want this church to be a place where we can tell the full truth of our lives, even the parts we may have been told must remain silent.

Statistically, there are some in this congregation who have also experienced some kind of abuse in your lives, whether physical, mental or sexual.

Where in your life have you experienced things that have caused you to raise walls around yourself?

Where have you closed the gates of your heart to protect your vulnerable self?

To do these things, to shut yourself off from experiences that were or are too terrible to process, to let yourself recede to the point where portions of yourself seem to have died, is nothing to be ashamed of. These are strategies of survival.

But in this Easter season our tradition tells us that God doesn't want the story to end on a cross or in a tomb. God offers us the possibility of new and unexpected life, most especially in the places where we least expect it. On the cross. In the tomb. In a body mortally wounded. In our own lives, even here, even today.

But resurrection is not resuscitation.

No one can experience trauma and not be marked by that experience. It changes us, and stays with us. But God tells us that it need not destroy us.

That is why I think the new Jerusalem, the Jerusalem that no longer has any enemies, still has its walls, and its gates. Because through the centuries it has known war and violence. And that history is retained. It isn't erased and denied. But in God's presence it is decentered and overcome.

I am marked by the experiences I had as a boy. And these things that happened to me will remain with me throughout my life. They have changed me, and are now part of what makes me me. But through the choices I make, and the healing I pursue, the gates of my heart are now more open than they have ever been, my walls aren't quite as high as they have been before. It doesn't mean that my gates never close. It just means they don't stay closed as long, and perhaps they don't close as tightly as they have before. Because I haven't been resuscitated, I haven't been restored to the person I was before I experienced abuse. Instead, I have known the power of resurrection, the power of new life that doesn't deny my history, but incorporates it into a new possibility of who I can be.

And God offers this experience of new life to you too.

Where do you see this power of resurrection working in your life?

Where is the new life, the life not controlled by trauma, growing within you?

What are the moments when your doors can stay open longer, and your walls don't need to be quite as high?

I bet if you look you can find the promise of Easter working within you. Because Easter isn't about one cross, and one body, one tomb, and one very special sunrise. Easter is God's gift to all of us, even here, even now.

Amen.