

KEEP BRIGHT THE VISION
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Sixth Sunday of Easter
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5

The spirit carried me away to a high mountain and showed me the holy city coming down out of heaven. I saw no temple, for its temple is the Almighty and the Lamb. The city has no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light. Its gates will never be shut.

Then I saw the river of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God. On either side of the river was the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

John 14:23-29

Jesus said, my peace I give to you.

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Two presidential candidates claim to be leading a movement to make our nation great again—one by reasserting American clout around the world; the other by restoring equality and justice to our nation. One declares “America First.” The other declares a political revolution, a future to believe in.

And we want to believe the promises. After all, hope is bread for the desperate. We hope for a quick fix, some charismatic leader who will medivac us to the Promise Land. But as far as I know there’s no quick exit from the wilderness, from struggle, from the long journey. We walk on and on by faith.

Hope is not the same as optimism. Optimism is based on evidence or trends. Hope is not optimism. We hope despite evidence because we trust something greater than ourselves at work in the world. *My peace I give to you. Love one another. Love without limits. Love without borders. My peace I give to you.*

Love, as it turns out, is the way to peace. And love is hard work.

Our own faith tradition is based on a promise, a promise that launched a worldwide movement some 4,000 years ago. It’s not sectarian like ISIS. It’s not nationalistic like campaign slogans. It’s a promise of universal kinship.

Yes, we are Americans. But we are Christians first, rooted and grounded in an ancient promise. To be a true Christian is not to be a partisan of a religion or a nation. It is to be a servant of Christ, which is to say, a servant of love.

Through you, said the Holy One to Abraham and Sarah long ago, through you shall all families, tribes and nations of the world be blessed. As the mythic tale of Noah’s flood revealed: you can’t get world peace by killing all the bad guys. Even “god” in that folk tale repented of such an idea. War is not the answer.

Another way must be found.

You can see hints of that other way in the rainbow appearing in the heavens after the Great Deluge. Unity with diversity is a beautiful thing. It’s what makes the world thrive. It makes the world whole.

Through you shall all families, tribes and nations of the world be blessed. It's not about America first. It's about the world first. It's not about making America great. It's about making the world great, which is to say, making the world whole.

It's not about killing those who get in the way of our mission to bring peace, or democracy, or capitalism to the world. It's about bringing peace through compassion and healing. Peace itself is the way to peace. The means matter as much as the end.

Through our baptism we have been initiated into a radical movement, a movement to build the city of God, to cultivate the Beloved Community in all places, to work for universal kinship for we are all one.

The vision that inspires this movement begins in the mythic Garden of Eden graced by the Tree of Life. And it ends with another mythical tree growing by a river flow from the throne of God offering leaves for the healing of the nations.

The trees and the river may be metaphorical but they are also real. We can't be healed unless we live in harmony with trees and rivers, with nature and the natural world. Polluting rivers, destroying rain forests and slaughtering billions of animals in farm factories to feed the American diet is not the way. We are all one. Not just peoples and nations, but the whole earth.

And so we long for, pray for and work for a world where Christ shall reign forever. Some take that to mean, where Christianity shall rule the world. I don't see it that way. I see Christ as a symbol of cosmic, interdependent love inviting all to live together in peace, justice and kindness, where love rules all the world domains, including the domains we call our hearts and homes.

We are not called to be optimists. We are called to keep the vision bright, to be hopeful and to faithfully work for a just and peaceful world.

One heart. One love. One world.