

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend Courtney Veazey
Sunday, May 25, 2025

Loving God, fountain of every blessing,
open us to your life-giving word,
and fill us with your Holy Spirit
so that living water may flow through our hearts –
a spring of hope for a thirsty world;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

A reading from the book of Revelation.

“And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.”

Holy wisdom, holy word.

Thanks be to God.

The book of Revelation – like the book of Ezekiel – is one of my favorites.

Both books are full of strange images that only the best performance artists could create,
and yes, Christ even meets us here.

In the strangely prophetic and apocalyptic –
the forward thinking and unveiling.

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In the powerful, poetic visions that the theologian Walter Brueggemann describes as offering “shattering, evocative speech that breaks fixed conclusions and presses us always toward new, dangerous, imaginative possibilities.”¹

In a world that builds temples to efficiency, dominance, and war and that bows down to thrones of nationalism and despotism, I dare say it is time for Spirit-fueled imagination to flow through the streets of our souls, cities, and nations.

Imagination that shatters our preconceived notions, breaks our foregone conclusions, and moves us toward new possibilities that feel dangerously life-altering.

The book of Revelation was written beneath the shadow of a corrupt empire for people living underneath the rule of a government that persecuted its own.

It was written as a blessing for those who read its prophetic words, heard those words, and kept those words.²

This book is meant to be read, heard, and held – particularly during seasons in which the systems that structure our lives feel destructive and soul-crushing.

For this book is not only a work of prophetic unveiling – it is a work of resistance.

¹ *Finally Comes the Poet*, p. 6.

² Revelation 1:3

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Resistance has been on my mind since visiting our partner church in Cuba this past February.

During my time there I was reminded that oppressed people know exactly how oppression's grasp leaves its mark.

In one tender conversation, our host shared that they are praying for us here in the United States and that they can help us be churches of resistance.

Since my time with them, the question that I have been living with is "What does it mean to be a church of resistance?"

A church whose resistance is formed in our baptismal waters?

Waters that place the Lamb's name on our foreheads.

Waters that flow from the throne of God through the middle of the city street –
splashing into our font.

Waters that strengthen us to resist sin – to resist the Beast.

For the author of Revelation, the character of the Beast wages war, conquers, and kills.³ The Beast also speaks arrogant and blasphemous words⁴ and causes people to ask, "Who can fight against it?"⁵

We know this Beast, and we often feel powerless to respond.

Who can fight against sin and death?

³ Revelation 11:17

⁴ Revelation 13:5

⁵ Revelation 13:4

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To be a church of resistance – to stand against the Beast within us, our communities, and our world – we need a guiding vision for this faithful work that helps us cross over from death to life.

We need a vision that does not give to us as the world gives.

We need a vision that unfolds from our Advocate, Helper, and Comforter.

We need the holy city coming down out of heaven from God.

We need the Lamb.

Revelation blesses us as it gifts us with this guiding vision.

“I saw no temple in the city,” its author writes.

Temples to efficiency, dominance, and war are no more. Instead, the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb become our temple – the Lamb alone receives our worship and adoration.

The kings of the earth and the honor of the nations will bring their glory into the Lamb’s light – egos dissipate as the only glory that matters is the Lamb’s.

Gates will never be shut, and falsehoods will never enter the holy city.

Openness without deception.

Life-giving water bright as crystal in the middle of the street of the city.

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Sunday, May 25, 2025

Trees of life on both sides of this flowing, crystal river producing twelve kinds of fruit and leaves that heal nations.

Fresh, abundant, healing life breaks into the cracks and crevices of the city because the throne of the Lamb is in it.

Idolatrous thrones are no more as the Lamb's servants only worship God.

This is the vision we need to resist Beasts – to resist all within us and outside of us that offers death instead of abundant life.

The vision of a city whose foundation is the Lamb, whose light comes from God.

The vision of a nation who walks by God's light and whose gates remain open.

The vision of a people who see God's face.

Christ meets us in this vision that guides how we live in the streets of our city.

The beauty of our baptismal waters that mark our foreheads with the Lamb's name is this –

those waters wash over us for the entirety of our lives –

steadily cleansing our eyes, so we may see ever more clearly the vision implanted in our souls.

A vision that empowers us, as the American poet Carl Sandburg wrote, to “Dig and dream, dream and hammer, till your city comes.”⁶

⁶ <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/50874/the-windy-city-sections-1-and-6>

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So, we dig, dream, hammer, and resist – carrying life-giving water and healing leaves into the world.

When we find ourselves hating it here, we resist by remembering the gift of sacred community – shared meals, laughter, open arms and gates.

We resist through collective joy – through both loving and critiquing the countries and cultures that shape us.

We resist by engaging our world with eschatological hope – hope fueled by the vision of a city whose temple is the Lamb.

The theologian Gail Ramshaw reminds us that as we resist and wait for the fullness of this vision to come down out of heaven, this city for which we wait is also here.

She writes, “The city that radiates holiness, the city with ever-flowing water and food for all, is the Sunday assembly around word and sacrament. We reside in God as in a city.

Christ is the cornerstone of the city. Our communal life in the Spirit is like life in a city.”⁷

Christ meets us here – in the street of the city – in the rows of our pews – in our passing of the peace – in our confession and assurance and word and affirmation and prayers – in our joyful feast and our baptism.

Christ meets us here – in the Sunday assembly – setting before us a guiding vision for holy resistance to all that threatens to devour the Lamb.

⁷ *Treasures Old and New*, p. 90.

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Look around you and see this holy city – filled with fellow servants whose foreheads are marked with the Lamb's name.

Look around you and let the Spirit carry you away to holy resistance and dangerous imagination.