

Revelation 22:1-5

INTRODUCTION:

In these times of stunningly sorrowful tragedies, increasing civil unrest, and devastating natural disasters, it's easy to lose hope and sink into an abyss of cynical despair.

“What good can I do, it's only going to get worse and anyone who thinks they can change anything is fooling themselves.”

Sometimes it gets hard to hold on to the idea that there will be a brighter day. The Bible is full of laments and angry prayers about the declining state of humanity, the heartache of innocent suffering and what can sometimes feel like an absent God.

And yet, it is here in Scripture that we also read about God raising up unlikely heroes in unlikely places and prophets to proclaim God's promises of redemption and restoration. It is here where we find the story of creation. God spoke, and chaos transformed into order. God breathed life into all things - beauty abounded, and the world and everything in it flourished and teemed with abundance. And God said...it was good!

As the stories unfold, the cycles of joy and sorrow, destruction and redemption, hopelessness and renewal come and go from generation to generation... until...the final chapter of the final book in the Bible. Here the writer, John sees a vision of God's ultimate victory over every evil and that symbolic tree of life that cursed all humanity in Genesis becomes the very tree that reunites humanity with God. Hear now this poetic description of God's restoration of the original blessing of abundance, fulfillment and unity. How might these words offer us hope and meaning for today?

The book of revelation, chapter 22

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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 flowing through the middle of the city street. 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 servants will worship God; they will see the face of God, 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.

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Good and Loving God, it often feels as if the dark night will swallow us up. This morning we ask You to be our light. Brighten the pathways of peace. Guide us along the road of healing, renew our hope and make us ready to serve. Come Holy Spirit, Come. And, may my words and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to you our Rock and our Redeemer. AMEN

If you are new here or just visiting for the first time, let me tell you something about TriCon Church. Today every member of TriCon Church and a good many friends connected to this community begin an annual tradition that has been practiced since the first church organized 2000 years ago. To watch this sacred tradition unfold is both astonishingly beautiful and vexingly curious. It is mysterious and Spirit filled. I'm talking of course about the annual TriCon Stewardship Drive. That time of year when all of us are politely asked to sign promises to pledge our hard earned money to the ministry and mission of this church. Not to this denomination, just this church alone. Each of us is asked to consider how much money we are willing to entrust to our local church weighed against an enormous list of other pressing needs, financial commitments, future goals and many other worthy causes. Some would say it's a hard sell. Any outside observer might find the practice of this tradition of simply and quietly asking for a pledge to be quite inexplicable. It is reasonable to wonder what would cause these otherwise responsible, bright people to give away their money like this?

Well I'll tell you. We pledge because we are people who truly believe that God is still active in this world and we are invited to actually participate in God's healing of the nations. When we pledge our money, an abstract faith becomes real. Our pledge is the symbol of a sacred agreement that our life and the world we live in is better and more meaningful because of our participation with TriCon.

We live in a terrifyingly dangerous world where catastrophic events are breaking new records. We live in a time when lethal violent attacks are systematically

organized and executed like some kind of sport, a time when powerful world leaders to threaten the destruction of the nations, a time when wide spread indifference allows the gap between rich and poor to widen and the exploitation of the weak and powerless to go unchecked. In this cultural environment of suspicion, cynicism and fear, how can anyone honestly hold on to a hope for a better day? In such a world, who will stand against rampant injustice? Who still holds fast to God's promise that love is stronger than hate? Who will defiantly keep alive the practice forgiveness, as the only know cure for guilt, anger and resentment? For most people today it is a daily struggle just to make sense of our world. This is why we gather here. It is here in church where we remember and revive our core values and locate the courage to keep hope alive. It is here where we find the strength to stand together in open defiance against evil and actively organize and fight for justice. It is here in this community where we nurture a vibrant faith in a God who is not indifferent to the cries of the people, a faith that informs our actions and reorients our priorities. This is a place where civility and grace are the organizing principle and the words and example of Jesus guide us toward the healing of our own broken hearts and then the healing of the nations. This is the place we find relief in our shared pain and support when the bottom drops out. Here we discover that we are not alone. Together we can grab hold of a bigger promise and we find fulfillment in serving, caring, and even giving away money. In this community we are rooted in a faith that reveals a God of peace and justice, a God who invites us to participate in the work of healing our fractured world.

As crazy as it sounds to my secular friends, I love the fact that I can invest confidently in the mission and ministry that happens here. I financially support the church because I am absolutely certain that I am investing in the work of building a better world. I take great pleasure in contributing 10% of my after tax income to a community that for me is the proven antidote to the poison of despondent cynicism and the plague of chronic hopelessness.

I also love the fact that we can only do this together. Our pledges are the only revenue that keeps this enterprise going. Our pledges fund all the salaries, pay for benefits, enable all our programs and events. And, because we know that faith is an action verb we set aside a generous percentage, circling around 20% of every dollar, to freely give out to a host of worthy social justice ministries and missions working locally and around the world. The very fact that we not only exist but also thrive in this endeavor is no small achievement; it's actually quite remarkable. This business model in our current society is completely counter-intuitive. Giving money to TriCon Church goes completely against our capitalistic

principles of wealth management and preservation. The money I give here lowers my materialistic buying power and shatters the popular notion that enlightened self-interest is enough.

We give to TriCon Church because we are compelled and captivated by what goes on here. We are compelled and captivated by how the story of Jesus remains real and relevant in our daily lives and our hearts are filled with gratitude for what God is doing in this community. To willingly invest in TriCon Church is an act of faith, an enthusiastic vote of support for a people yearning to promote goodness and facilitate healing in our world. We are guided in the Way of Jesus; we stand together in courageous and open defiance of hate and injustice. We practice extravagant welcome and commit to finding better and better ways to serve one another even while reaching out to our neighbors to freely offer all that we have in every way we can.

To me, TriCon Church is the riverbed in which flows God's river of mercy, a river filled with living water flowing out to a parched and thirsty land. I believe that God has blessed us with this thriving, caring, grace-filled and beloved community for one reason; to become dedicated servants that facilitate God's healing of the nations. We are drawn together for this great work of restoration and I am convinced that every single contribution, great and small has eternal significance.

So let us celebrate community! Let us give freely and without reservation from the wealth and abundance God has blessed us with. Let us revel in the joy and fulfillment that is the sweet fruit of extravagant generosity. And let us move together, boldly unified into an uncertain future strengthened by a faith that compels us to walk as witnesses and living testimony of God's action in our world. Amen