

[Revelation 22:1-5](#)

When I was a child, the Dam Busters movie came to the local cinema and my Dad – who had loved his National Service in the RAF – took me to see it. To me as a boy, Barnes Wallis, who invented and trialled the ‘bouncing bomb’ not far from here at Brooklands, Wing Commander Guy Gibson, and the crew members of Bomber Command were surely national heroes. This Remembrance Sunday, only one member of Bomber Command is still alive – Squadron Leader ‘Johnny’ Johnson, who is about to celebrate his one hundredth birthday.

Heroes. As a youngster, I didn’t really consider the complex moral questions about the bombing of the Ruhr Valley and whether Christians could view it as justified under the Just War Theory of St Augustine, who said that in a just war you could only target those who were actively involved in the enemy’s war effort.

But I suspect that whatever stance we take on war, a lot of us do childlike thinking about it. As a teenager I was to embrace pacifism, but some would say that is naïve idealism. It can be equally naïve to assume that bombing your enemies into oblivion makes everything right.

And Christians will never totally agree on issues of war. I’m not going to try to take on that hopeless task today.

But I do want us to use this Lectionary reading from Revelation 22 to show us what God’s glorious vision of the future in his new creation is like, because that gives us a good idea of his will, and it therefore points to some of the things we can hope for and live by now as we prepare for the full coming of his kingdom.

Firstly, in the New Creation there is *life*:

We hear about the ‘water of life’ coming from God and the Lamb (verse 1), just as in Ezekiel the water flowed from the Temple, the place of God’s presence. And we read about the ‘tree of life’ (verse 2), which you will remember from the Garden of Eden, so here Eden is restored but supersized.

So this is life that comes only from God (the water of life) and it is immortal life (Adam would have lived forever had he eaten from the tree of life in Eden). This is eternal life. This is the gift of God. This is the life we receive when we respond to the grace of God in Jesus Christ and find forgiveness of sins and new purpose in following Christ and turning away from sin.

It is this life, the gift of God, which stands in contrast to the death we witness in the world and which is at the forefront of our thinking on Remembrance Sunday. The ways of God are life, not death.

And it is not just physical death but spiritual death which the life of God opposes and replaces. To stay wilfully apart from God is to choose eternal death.

Therefore, one thing we might remember on Remembrance Sunday is the importance of the Gospel. Yes, we join with the rest of our society in commemorating the war dead and the sacrifices that millions made, but as Christians we go further. We say that there is an antidote to the ways of hatred, mistrust, and violence that lead to war, and that is in Jesus Christ and him only.

So one thing we learn from Revelation 22 is that in the church we need to keep the main thing the main thing. And the main thing is the proclamation of the Gospel. What a tragedy it is that other things get in the way. The other day a minister who is retiring next year told me how he sincerely hoped that in his final year of active ministry he would be able to concentrate on preaching and teaching rather than on GDPR, accounts, property, and all the other governance issues.

But not only that, this is a reminder to all of us in the church that we have our part to play in sharing the Good News of Jesus among those we know. It isn't that we are all preachers – thank goodness we're not – and it isn't that we're all called to go door-to-door or button-hole people in the street. But it remains the call to all of us to talk naturally in conversations about the difference Jesus has made in our lives.

If on Remembrance Sunday we want to see a better world, then it is incumbent upon those of us who believe a better world is coming to share that Good News with the world.

Secondly, in the New Creation there is *healing*:

We read that 'the leaves of the tree [of life] are for the healing of the nations' (verse 2) and that is then explained with the words, 'No longer will there be any curse' (verse 3).

The curse on the nations is healed in the New Creation. What does that mean? It means that the curse of Eden is reversed. In the pictorial language of early

Genesis, it was the sin of Adam and Eve that led to a widespread curse on humanity. It was a wide-ranging curse. It not only adversely affected our relationship with God, our relationships with each other were cursed, so was our relationship with work, with children, and with the whole of creation. All of life was under a curse. What was previously blessed became cursed.

But no more. Through the Cross and Resurrection God restores the curse. We can know him. We can have good relationships. We can find purpose at work. We can bless and restore creation – something that is surely on our minds as the COP26 conference ends. All these are God's gifts of healing in Christ. They are partial in this life, but they will be complete in the New Creation.

Now this is important in following on from my first point. Because there are those who will say that it isn't enough to preach the Gospel, and that it doesn't bring about the wider transformation in society. They will point to things like the dreadful genocide in Rwanda back in 1994 and point out that Rwanda was a heavily evangelised nation with a high proportion of confessing Christians. Indeed, in certain parts of the Christian world it was celebrated as a great example of evangelism and revival. People spoke about the 'East African Revival.' Yet many of these Christians participated in the terrible massacres.

The problem with Rwanda is that a narrow Gospel was proclaimed, one that only called converts to a personal, perhaps even private, piety. We need the call to conversion, but it needs to be a call to an entirely converted life.

Because the message that the whole curse is lifted in the New Creation and that healing has come is a message that applies right across life – not just to personal and private issues like relationships, but also to public and social areas, such as work.

So what we cannot do as Christians is truncate the Gospel. Some truncate it by the sort of narrow private piety I've just described – 'Come to Jesus, and let him put your personal life in order.' Others truncate the Gospel but omitting the call to conversion and simply proclaiming that God loves social justice. But the healing of the nations from the curse of the Fall means we need to declare and to live out the healing from the curse in every sphere of life.

As we seek a better world than the one that we live in, let alone the ones that provoked world wars, our calling as Christians is to proclaim the Gospel in all its fulness and to live as an example of that all-encompassing Gospel which brings healing and restoration to every broken part of life.

This will therefore not only be in our spoken message, but in our lifestyles, and in what we offer the world. Too often churches are filled with toxic behaviour, and when that happens it's a denial of the Gospel and it's a denial of opportunity to the world to know the beauty of God's healing love.

Instead, let's be people who know that the life of the Gospel brings healing and let's show that.

Thirdly, in the New Creation there is *light*:

There will be no more night, we read in verse 5. At this time of year when the clocks have gone back and the nights have drawn in, that sounds like Good News to me!

The other day on Twitter, someone parodied the old Simon and Garfunkel song 'The Sound of Silence' by writing these words:

Hello darkness, my old friend,
Why are you here? It's 4 pm.

Not that I want things to be like New York, 'The city that never sleeps', having stayed in an hôtel there on Broadway where you could hear traffic noise and be assaulted by neon advertising 24/7.

But light instead of darkness. No more the darkness of sin, because my guilt has been wiped away. No more the darkness of continual sin, because the Holy Spirit has helped us to live differently. And no more the darkness caused by the sins others have inflicted on us, because God in Christ has healed us and helped us to forgive.

All those things that have brought darkness in this life will no longer cast shadows over us and suck life out of us. We shall know the beauty of God's light.

How does he do this? There might be a clue in the preceding verse:

⁴They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

God's name on our foreheads. Do you remember when as a child you had to write your name on everything you owned, and when you had name tags sewn into your clothes? God puts his name on us and says, 'You belong to me.' What could be more reassuring and restorative than that? We belong to him. His name is upon us. This can carry us through the darkest times: we are Christ's.

We may not be facing a world war today, but where could we apply this? You've heard me talk about the fact that depression has had quite an effect on my family, and so you may not be surprised to know that I'm concerned by the increase in mental health issues since COVID-19 hit and I believe the church can offer something to the world alongside all the necessary medical resources.

And there is an encouraging growth in Christian resources for use in the church and the community to help with this. I'm looking at one called [Kintsugi Hope](#). Whether it's the right resource I don't know yet, but the word 'kintsugi' is Japanese for a way of restoring broken pottery by painting it with seams of gold and thus making it more beautiful.

Whether that particular path is the right way forward for us or not, we have here a wonderful picture in these five verses from Revelation about how the fulness of the Gospel hope in the New Creation is the cure for the sickness that the world faces with when we think of the events that led to the establishment of Remembrance Sunday and its continuation. We also recognise that war is far from the only way in which there is brokenness, sickness, and darkness in our world.

We are people of hope. Jesus brings life, healing, and light. One day his new world will be flooded with these things. In the meantime, it's our call to participate in his work by proclaiming the Gospel, by living and advocating healed lives, and by showing the world how Christ's light overcomes the darkness.

Remembrance Sunday, then, reminds the church of our unfinished task.