

The Forever Garden
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Maple Grove UMC
Rev. Patricia Wagner

¹⁰And 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. ²³And 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. ²⁴The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. ²⁵Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²

Then the angel^[a] showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life^[b] with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³ Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants^[c] will worship him; ⁴ they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ 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.

When Dad died, I got the phone call. It was still dark, I awakened my daughter and we silently dressed and got in the car. A few miles on she spoke: “Mama, Grandpa showed me what's he's seeing and he's not colorblind anymore.”

His vision had awakened her, and then she'd gone back to sleep, but still saw it clearly.

She spent most of the next day painting. There emerged on canvas a grove of strangely beautiful, tall trees, flowing water, a sun of many colors, creatures mingling, and a door opening into light,

She labored over the sky, layered different hues of blue, a color her grandfather had never truly seen.

"I have to get this right," she said.

Once complete, we were in awe. None of us understood how, nor doubted that Dad had at death communicated this vision to this beloved granddaughter. Her open spirit the one most ready to receive it.

It comforted all of us, particularly my mother who spent days looking at it. Dad had suffered so much, and now he was steeped in beauty, in a garden. We were all filled with wonder and relief.

John's revelation in Chapter 21 and 22, must have done the same; for those who have suffered from the wickedness of the Roman and Babylonian empires.

The spirit, says, John, conveyed him up a mountaintop the place of vision and there he is shown a city and water, bright as crystal, flowing through it. And each side of the river is the tree of life which bears fruit endlessly fruit and whose leaves are for the healing of all the nations.

All there are marked by the name of God, claimed forever.
There is no temple, nor light not from a sun or lamp but God's
illuminating presence fills all in all.

Rivers, trees, light like what Dad saw, and I'm sure those worn
down by war and pestilence and the politics of empires felt, as
we did, wonder and relief.

We each may get our glimpses: In the mid 1300s, during the
Black Death, the bubonic plague, when Julian of Norwich was
20 and a half years old, she fell ill, and was given vision of the
way in which God loved the world, and heard God say *All Shall
be Well*.

I ran into a friend yesterday at the garden center who shared
that his father is facing death. After some harrowing years of
impoverishment and sickness, now he had a bed at a good care
center, and on Friday, he smiled and said: *"I'm ready - and it's all
okay."*

But John's word is not only about what awaits but what is to
happen, a vision for this side of glory. We seem to be a people
without vision. After a respite, we've returned to troubled days
filled with vitriol and distrust that has left everyone more
vulnerable to a deadly disease.

And yet, has not God given us what we need: Scientists, minds
given by God have worked together to create a vaccine, like
those leaves for the healing of the nations and they will
continue to work to help us.

And John's vision of common glory, even in this divided city, we
are brought together by creation.

When Rose and I walk along the Scioto we meet there people are there from income group neighborhood and an abundance of nations relishing the trees, the light the water flowing bright as crystal, comforting, all of us.

Each of us given eyes to see and ears to hear born into the garden, to be stewards of it, and one another, to recognize distress and ease it, to recognize evil and upend it, to take all of it, and our lives, in their beauty and struggle and cry *holy*. And then, at the last to lay down our tools, and be delivered into wonder into God's forever garden.

I showed Rose's painting to a friend, who looked at the blue sky she'd painted so carefully, *do you know what color that is? It's indigo. Have you heard of the Indigo children? Children who had each been given a vision of the life after life, and this is the color they all describe.*

Rose did not paint that scene again, but went on to paint a great tree, rooted, stretching outward. *"This is how I imagine him," she said of her grandfather, "full of new life."*

And it seems to me that God wants that too, for us, and gave us Jesus who would help us live it on this side of glory. Come, he says, come to the table, receive the healing leaves, the fruit of the vine, the bread of the earth. Come, be a gardener with me.