

Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 18 ~ Revelation 18:19-19:2

They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: "Woe! Woe to you, great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin!"

"Rejoice over her, you heavens! Rejoice, you people of God! Rejoice, apostles and prophets! For God has judged her with the judgment she imposed on you."

Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said:

"With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again.

The music of harpists and musicians, pipers and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again.

No worker of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again. The light of a lamp will never shine in you again.

The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world's important people.

By your magic spell all the nations were led astray.

In her was found the blood of prophets and of God's holy people, of all who have been slaughtered on the earth."

After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting:

"Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments.

He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants."

As is often the case, none of the things that we are called to lament in this passage are evil in and of themselves. There was much that Babylon had to offer. The idea of a great city devoid of music is too awful to contemplate. Commerce and industry are bedrock components of every civilization on the planet. People commit to one another in various ways all over the world. The sight of lights in the windows is almost the very definition of civilization.

The end of verse 23 is the key passage for me – “By [Babylon’s] magic spell all the nations were led astray.” We’ve been so deafened by the clamor of the modern world that we can no longer hear God’s voice and we’ve been seduced into believing that anything is okay to get us what we want.

Babylon is a symbol of the more pervasive, more human, ill – putting ourselves before God.

As we prepare ourselves for the Advent of the Christ Child among us, where are the places that we’ve been seduced into putting ourselves first to the detriment of others? The rejoicing in heaven at the end of this passage is thunderous because the evil that Babylon’s single-minded ambition inflicted on multitudes is avenged.

Another lesson is that God is holy. It truly is, as the writer of the Book of Hebrews says, a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God. Our actions have consequences and the rift of sin will be healed one way or another. No one can see God’s face and live – except through the loving lens of Christ Jesus. Here is a Savior worth waiting for, a God worth serving!

As we embark on this last week of waiting before the Christ Child is born anew in our hearts, stop long enough to allow God’s chinks of light to penetrate our closed world. Allow the wonder of God entering into human history as a tiny baby to fill you. Be transported to that heavenly throng where we, too, can choose to bow before the Godhead and shout with the multitude, “Hallelujah!

Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgements.”

~ Ms. Diane Holland
Christ Church, Montpelier