

# "The New Jerusalem"

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Date: 02 June 2024

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning, church. It's good to see you all this morning. I want to say thank you to everyone who participated in iHeart Day yesterday, especially the site leaders and the committee members, especially Spandan Seha, who led the charge for us amongst the iHeart committee.

So, yeah, let's give a round of applause to everyone who helped. It takes a lot of work to pull off an event like that. So thank you all for all you did to make that day of success. Well, would you turn with me to Revelation 21?

Revelation 21. We're picking up today in verses 9 through 27. If you'd like to follow along in the Pew Bible, it's page 977.

Revelation 21, starting in verse 9. Let me pray, and then I'll read. Father, indeed, the church's one foundation, our one foundation is Jesus Christ, our Lord.

So we pray that as we settle into this passage this morning, we would see Christ displayed in his beauty through your word, and that by your spirit we would be drawn to him in faith and transformed in his likeness by your spirit.

[ 1 : 26 ] We ask this in his mighty name. Amen. All right, Revelation 21, verse 9 through the end of the chapter. Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.

And he carried me away in the spirit to a great high mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper clear as crystal.

It had a great high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed.

On the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies four square, its length the same as its width.

[ 2 : 39 ] And he measured the city with his rod, twelve thousand stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. He also measured its wall, one hundred and forty-four cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement.

The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel.

The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst.

And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. And 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 gives its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day, and there will be no night there.

[ 4 : 03 ] They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations, but nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

So imagine that you and I are walking the streets of Rome in the late second century. And as we make our way past the open-air markets and the hustle and the bustle, we find ourselves after a

while in the center of the city, in the Palatine Hill District.

This area of the city used to be where all the wealthy lived, and there are even some imperial palaces kind of left over there. And as we cut down an alley, we come across an old boarding school for imperial pages for attendants and messengers, and rumor has it at one time it used to be the house of the Emperor Caligula.

But as we pass by, we see something scrawled on one of the walls. It's graffiti, just like any city.

They had graffiti in the ancient world as well. But when we get a little closer, we see that the graffiti is actually a crudely drawn picture of a young man worshiping a figure hanging on a cross, and the figure hanging on the cross has the head of a donkey.

And below this drawing are the words, Alex Amenos, which is a name. Alex Amenos worships his God. It's actually a piece of graffiti making fun of Christians.

[ 5 : 39 ] You see, this is what many people thought of Christians in the early centuries. They thought they were fools. Who would worship a crucified Jew? So Christians, like young Alex Amenos, were ridiculed and mocked.

Ironically, historians think this might be one of the earliest depictions of Jesus that's survived. A piece of graffiti mocking both Jesus and those who worship him.

And you can actually still see this piece of graffiti today in the Palatine Museum in Rome. I think at times we can resonate with Alex Amenos, can't we?

Ofentimes being a Christian doesn't bring you any social benefit or social standing. Just the opposite, right? Your neighbors or your friends find out that you're a Christian, and they think you're a little strange at best, or foolish, close-minded, even bigoted at worst.

Who would give their allegiance to a crucified, first-century Jew? And who would shape their life around the stories and teachings of a 2,000-year-old book?

[ 6 : 54 ] And oftentimes what happens when this negative social pressure or social shame sets in is one of two things. On the one hand, we as Christians can be tempted to just sort of withdraw, to sort of hide, to fade into the background.

We try to just disappear or go unnoticed. You know, rather than loving our neighbors and our enemies, we avoid them. And then we just sort of become like them. On the other hand, when we face that sort of negative pressure, we can get angry and fight back.

Rather than loving our neighbors and our enemies, we attack them. But you know, neither of these is the path that the book of Revelation has held out before us as the church.

Revelation has held up a vision for us of being a church in the midst of the world that holds forth a robust witness, neither avoiding nor attacking, but testifying to the one true God and to the grace of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And testifying even if it means great misunderstanding, great exclusion, testifying in love even if it means suffering. But the question is, amidst the social shame and the ridicule, how do we stay on that path of faithful witness and not fall away into either avoidance mode or attack mode?

[ 8 : 29 ] Well, one way we can do this, and what we see in our passage here, one way we can do this is to keep the future glory of the church in view.

What John is doing in this passage before us is holding up a picture of the church's true identity, our true destiny, our future perfected state in the new heavens and new earth.

And he's holding up that vision so that we might know who we truly are and who God sees us to be despite the world's passing ridicule and shame.

And knowing who we truly are, knowing what our future truly is, that is what will help us to persist in the loving witness that we're called to give to the crucified and risen Jesus with our words and with our life, even when the world thinks it's ridiculous.

So this vision of the heavenly Jerusalem of the new city of God is a picture of the church perfected in glory in the new heavens and new earth. Now, how do we know that? Well, look at verse 9. In verse 9, the angel says, Come, I'll show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb, and then in verse 10, John sees the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

[ 9 : 51 ] So the city is a representation of the bride, and the bride, as we know from chapter 17 in Revelation, is the church. Now, this all sort of has deep Old Testament resonances, right?

Because the city of Jerusalem in the Old Testament was the central place where God's people dwelled. It was the sort of center of the people of God. And so the city of Jerusalem sort of became a metaphor for the people themselves, the people in communion with their God.

Now, what does John see as this city descends from heaven? Well, look at verse 11. What's the defining feature of this city? John says, It comes down out of heaven from God, what? Having the glory of God. Having the glory of God. That's the big idea of our passage. The people of God will share the glory of God. You might feel ridiculed, rejected, excluded, but if you belong to Christ, then this is true of you.

[ 11 : 02 ] You, the people of God, will share the glory of God. And the rest of this vision unpacks this glory. It unpacks what this glory is.

And we'll kind of walk through it together. We'll see that the church shares first in the glory of God's unity, and then John is going to show us how the church shares in the glory of God's holiness, and then last, we'll look at how the church shares the glory of God's presence.

And each of these aspects of God's glory gives us not just hope for the future, although certainly that, but it's also a picture of the sort of people we should be now as we seek to reflect the glory of God, even now as we look forward to the new heavens and new earth.

Okay, so let's look at these aspects of God's glory that we share. First, God's people share the glory of God's unity. We see this in verses 12 through 14. The city has 12 gates and 12 foundations, and on the gates are the names of the 12 tribes of Israel, and on the foundations are the names of the 12 apostles.

Now, it's pretty clear what this means, right? The eternal city, the renewed people of God, will be a unity of both Old Testament and New Testament believers. You see, in the history of redemption, if we take the whole Bible together, there's only one people of God, and this one people of God is the union of Jew and Gentile around the one Lord, Jesus Christ.

[ 12 : 35 ] We could look through passage after passage in the Old Testament that spoke plainly about this reality, starting all the way back with Abraham, who was promised that through him and his offspring, all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

Or we could look through the book of Psalms where we could often find sung how the nations would come and glorify the Lord as their God. Do you remember some of those lines?

Let the peoples praise you, O God. Let all the peoples praise you, right? The nations would come in to this one people of God. Or how about, let the nations be glad and sing for joy.

And this Old Testament theme finds its fulfillment in the New Testament when the Messiah, Jesus, comes to fulfill the promise to Abraham and to fulfill all the songs of the poets and prophets.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul explains this in Ephesians 2, verses 11 through 20. He's writing to Gentiles and he says, therefore remember, at one time, you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands.

[ 13 : 43 ] He says, remember that you were at one time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants and promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

But now, in Christ Jesus, you, who were once far off, have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who's made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility. by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

Then Paul says this, he says, and he came and he preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father, so you're no longer strangers and aliens, but you're fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

Through the cross, the two have been made one. Do you see the glory in this? What Jesus achieved through the cross, no other world ruler, no other empire, no other social program could achieve.

[ 15 : 28 ] Long before the world celebrated diversity and difference, long before the world celebrated valuing our unique cultures and backgrounds, the church had been for 2,000 years building a multicultural, multi-ethnic people where difference wasn't erased, but that difference was brought near into the full body of Christ.

So we worship the crucified one, yes, and we glory in him despite the world's ridicule. And John sees a vision in Revelation of the new city of God's people in glory where those divisions and those

hostilities are over once and for all and where there's truly peace.

We're crafted and created into one city. And this unity and diversity which we share is, at the end of the day, a sharing in God's glory.

for God himself is a unity amidst diversity, isn't he? The book of Revelation, not to mention the whole New Testament, has shown us that God is a triune God, right?

The one who sits on the throne and the Lamb and the sevenfold spirit that comes forth from the throne are one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[16:55] God is one in three and three in one. In other words, the very heart of ultimate reality is a diverse unity or a unified diversity.

And God's people reflect that glory. We will reflect it ultimately in the new heavens and new earth when people from every tribe and tongue and nation will make up this new city.

But we also reflect it right now. In our local churches, we should be reflections of this heavenly reality to come.

We will do it imperfectly, of course, but there should be a foretaste of the future right now in our present. Now, how do we do that?

How do we do this? How do we reflect the glory of God's unity here and now? Well, we do it by loving one another. The unity of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit is a unity of love.

[18:00] Jesus himself said, the world will know my disciples by your love. What made the early church attractive despite the ridicule and shame was its love. So let me mention five practical ways to love one another here and now and to reflect God's unity.

And I'll go through these quickly because we've got more to cover this morning. But how do we love one another practically and reflect this unity? First, we do it by practicing church membership.

Church membership says, I love you enough to commit to you.

And at Trinity, we have the great privilege to be made up of members from many countries and languages and backgrounds. And when we commit to each other, we're demonstrating the glory of God's unity.

Secondly, we attend Sunday services. being here in person matters. It says, I love you enough to show up for you.

Now, you all are here, so maybe I'm preaching to the choir, right? But maybe you've not been here for a while, so this is for you, right? We love each other by showing up for one another. We're not here to be consumers, to simply watch church on a screen like we'd watch any old TV show.

[19:15] No, we're here in the flesh to love and know each other. We reflect the glory of God's unity by showing up for each other, by gathering together on Sunday.

Third way, we welcome differences. We say, I love you enough to listen to you. You might have a different political view than mine.

You might have different musical preferences than mine. We might approach all sorts of things differently. But we reflect the glory of God's unity by saying, I love you enough to listen to you, to welcome differences and to learn from each other.

Fourth, and this is quite countercultural, we confront sin. We say, I love you enough to correct you and to be corrected by you.

Welcoming difference does not mean that we don't hold each other to the way of Christ and the word of God. We need to love each other enough to encourage and correct and bring all of our lives under the lordship of Christ and his word, even when it seems to be a path at total variance to the world around us.

[20:34] Fifth, we mutually serve each other. we say, I love you enough to serve you and to be served by you. We receive from one another, we give to one another our time, our energy, our gifts, our talents, our resources.

Now a church that's doing these things, that's committing, that's showing up, that's listening, that's correcting, that's serving, that will start to be a church that's lovingly reflecting the glory of God's unity.

So John wants us to have a vision of God's people sharing God's glory and first we see the glory of God's unity in this vision of the new Jerusalem. Next, what we see next is a glory, is that we share in the glory of God's holiness, the glory of God's holiness.

Now, this is in verses 15 through 21. In these verses we see the measurements and the materials of this great city and the impression we get is that the city is the perfection of beauty.

The dimensions of the city are precise and the adornment of the city is radiant. It's the perfection of beauty. But what is the beauty of the people of God?

[ 21 : 55 ] It's not money, right? God's people aren't beautiful because they're wealthy. It's not fame or success. God's people aren't beautiful because they receive earthly praise.

So what is it? What is this perfection of beauty? Well, it's an interesting detail that these gemstones that adorn the twelve foundations, right, they seem to be the centerpiece of this adornment of beauty.

That those gemstones that are listed there, as you might have guessed, that's not the first time those stones have turned up in Scripture. Now, on the one hand, we see something like this alluded to in Isaiah 54.

In Isaiah 54, God says, O afflicted one, storm-tossed and not comforted, behold, I will set your stones in antimony and lay your foundations with sapphires.

I will make your pinnacles of agate and your gates of carbuncles and all your walls of precious stones. So there, the prophet is sort of envisioning a time when the troubled and storm-tossed people of God will be vindicated and redeemed and comforted.

[ 23 : 07 ] You may be afflicted now, God is saying, but one day you will be whole and adorned in beauty. But, you know, if we go back even further in the Scriptures, we find that those stones that are listed in the foundation, almost a similar, very similar set of stones show up in the book of Exodus, of all places.

And where in Exodus? Well, we see very similar stones on the breastplate of the high priest in Exodus 28. And each of the 12 stones on the sort of panel that the high priest would wear, each of those 12 stones is engraved with the name of one of the tribes of Israel.

So what God was doing in Exodus in the Old Testament is that he was sort of making the high priest carry on his chest a representation of the people whenever he ministered before God.

He became their representative. What the high priest did, he did on behalf of the whole people. And what was true of the high priest became true of all the people.

But the Old Testament high priest was just a foreshadow of an even greater high priest to come.

Our great high priest, the Lord Jesus.

[ 24 : 28 ] You see, he was our representative in the greatest degree. Jesus became like us in every respect. He didn't just sort of carry a representation of us on his chest, right?

He took our very flesh. He took on all of our weakness, all of our trials and temptations. He became like us in every respect except for our sin.

And he lived a life of complete obedience before the Father. Jesus' life was the most beautiful life ever lived.

It was a life of love, mercy, compassion, of truth, of justice, of generosity. It was a life of perfect holiness.

You see, Jesus didn't need the high priest's breastplate. He represented us by taking on our flesh.

And he was beautiful because of his perfect righteousness.

[ 25 : 31 ] So what John sees in the vision of the new city is the perfected people of God shining with the beauty of the high priest.

the beauty of Jesus, our true high priest, covering us, adorning us, making us shine.

We're clothed in his righteousness. We're adorned with the perfection of his holiness. One day, John sees all of our sin being removed and the church shining like the most precious gemstones.

Now, we have some wonderful artists here at Trinity and Kim Nugas lent me a couple of books about gemstones a couple of weeks ago as I prepared for this sermon.

So I looked some of them up in these wonderful books. And the thing I came away with as someone not very knowledgeable about jewels or jewelry is that they're radiant.

[ 26 : 32 ] Each one unique and brilliant in their own way. You know what will be surprising, friends, in the new heavens and the new earth?

I think one of the things that will be very surprising is how beautiful, how ravishing holiness is. We tend to think that obedience to God is boring, that it will kill our joy, that it will stifle our identity.

But in the new city we will see that exactly the opposite was the case. Insofar as we followed the path of Jesus in obedience, that was when our lives were most radiant with who we were really meant to be.

That's when our unique identity shone forth like a precious stone. God and now imagine a church where not just one or two people are beginning to shine with the beauty of holiness, but a whole congregation.

Like a kaleidoscope of brilliance. If we could see what God sees, we might need to shield our eyes. That's how beautiful the church is.

[ 27 : 58 ] And what a motivation I think this is to pursue this holiness now. As Paul says in Romans 12, let's not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds into the image of Christ.

But how do we go about doing that? How do we pursue this holiness? Well, it begins, the first step, it begins by remembering that our righteousness comes from Christ.

That we are justified, that is, we're counted righteous and accepted by God through sheer grace by faith in Jesus. His righteousness is imputed to us, it's a gift.

We're made beautiful in God's eyes by grace, not by works. In other words, when you woke up this morning, no matter how you felt, no matter what sort of day you had yesterday, if you are in Christ, then God looks at you and sees beauty like a shining sapphire, like a radiant emerald.

He is pleased with you. He loves you. He's forgiven all your sins. He's embraced you and welcomed you forever. Now, how could that be?

[ 29 : 25 ] How could God view us this way? Well, it's through the cross, you see. You know, that piece of graffiti on the streets of Rome that we sort of imaginatively walked by, that piece of graffiti was more true than the person who scrawled it ever imagined.

You know, they thought they were making fun of Christianity. But friends, isn't this the beauty of the gospel? What is the good news? What does the gospel say?

It says the eternally beautiful one became ugly. He became a donkey and hung on a tree so that you and I, no matter how ugly our sins, could be made beautiful.

Yes, Alex Amenos worships his God. Is there any other God worthy of worship? Who else loved you at such cost, with such grace?

Who else now views you with such regard, with such beauty? And when you start there, that you're saved by Jesus' costly grace, then your life is different.

[ 30 : 52 ] It starts to change. How? Because you want to be more like this God who loves you so much. Your motivation to obey God totally changes.

You don't obey because you're afraid now that God might reject you. You don't obey because you're hoping to win God's favor and keep Him on your good side. He's already done everything to accept you and keep you. Now you want to obey simply because you love the one who loved you. And you know deep in your bones that this is the path of beauty and how could we not walk in it? Of course, the church has not always lived up to this beauty we've been given, has it?

You know, you study the history of the church and you'll see how it has often strayed from this path of holiness and beauty and grace. But you know, as Christians today, we don't need to shy away from that or to hide that.

The former commissioner of baseball once said, we must never lose sight of our history. He's talking about the history of racism in the Major League Baseball.

[ 32 : 01 ] He says, we must never lose sight of our history insofar as it is ugly never to repeat it, insofar as it is glorious to cherish it.

I think those are good words for us Christians too. We don't ignore the ugly parts when we've failed to live up to this grace and we don't ignore the beautiful parts either because both are instructive for us.

And each day we return to our justification in Christ and from there we find the Spirit Himself is fueling our sanctification, that process of becoming more and more like Christ.

So the people of God will share the glory of God. John's shown us the glory of God's unity in the church and also the glory of God's holiness in the church.

Third and last, we see the glory of God's presence. The glory of God's presence. We see this in the final paragraph of our text, verses 22 through 27. In this new city we find something else surprising.

[ 33 : 11 ] Unlike nearly every city in the ancient world, this city has no temple. And not just that, there's not even a sun or a moon. Why?

Because neither one are needed anymore. There's no need of a temple. There's no need of sun and moon. Why is that?

Because God is there. God is there in His fullness. Which means the whole city is a temple, as it were.

You know, that's why the measurements of the city in verses 15 through 16, those measurements, they kind of sound a lot like the Holy of Holies in the Old Testament tabernacle and temple. The Old Testament Holy of Holies was sort of that special place in the middle of the temple where God's presence sort of dwelt in its fullness.

Right? And it was a perfect cube. And then John looks at the new heavens and new earth and the city coming down to God and the whole thing is the Holy of Holies. The whole city has become the dwelling place of God.

[ 34 : 14 ] The temple's obsolete. And the light that shines over the city is never-ending. Not because the sun never goes down, but because there's no need for the sun at all.

Because the Lamb, the risen Jesus Christ is there who is and will ever be the light of the world. One day we will be awash in the light of God's presence.

Can you and I even express the joy, the love, the thrill of that day? It's surprising how John expresses it.

He says, in that city its gates will never be shut by day and there will be no night there. Now, why did cities close their gates in the ancient world?

Well, cities closed their gates for protection, for safety. Right? When night fell, danger came, so they closed the gates. But in that place, there is no more danger.

[ 35 : 23 ] So the gates are always open. The front doors of the homes are always unlocked. Why? Because we're safe.

The presence of God is there and we have nothing to fear. Sin is gone. Selfishness is gone. Hatred and enmity are gone.

It's just the love of God filling our hearts and letting us live in joy and without fear. What a glorious thing that will be.

And we rightly long for that day. But even now, even now, we're meant to live in light of that future. After all, the church now is the temple of the Holy Spirit. God does dwell in our midst. The Holy Spirit, God's empowering presence, is here, right now.

[ 36 : 28 ] God's love of God abroad in our hearts, driving out fear, empowering our worship of Christ, lifting our hearts to Him.

God is in our midst. Christ. And that means there should be something attractive about Christians. Our gatherings should be attractive. This should be a place where fear begins to recede. How? Because perfect love casts out fear.

Now, I'm not talking about leaving our doors unlocked. Right? You should all lock your cars after you park when you come to church. Please don't leave your car unlocked when you park downtown, right?

No. I'm talking about when the Holy Spirit moves and makes the love of God real to our hearts through worship, through prayer, through hearing His Word, and the armor that we wear in our souls begins to loosen.

[ 37 : 43 ] And our fears of not being smart enough or attractive enough or wealthy enough, these fears begin to recede in the light of the love of the Lamb.

And then together we become a place where the nations come in. We're not afraid to be known and to be loved because we are known and we are loved by the everlasting love of God.

This is the glory of His presence. the awe and wonder of a church renewed by the Holy Spirit in love and without fear.

Now surely, if we're going to be that sort of church, we need to pray. We need to pray and not just ask God to fill us fresh with His Spirit, but we need to pray and enjoy the access that we have to the Father through the Son.

Remember the words of Paul that we read earlier, in Christ, we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. Do we enjoy the presence of God now? Do we live like it?

[ 39 : 05 ] Or are we still concerned about the opinions and the approval of the world? You see, the church is getting it all wrong if we try to live for the world's approval.

Because one day, the nations will stream into the new city and bring their honor and glory into it. You see, all that's God honoring in our various cultures and backgrounds will be part of the celebration on that day.

It will be brought into the city and give glory to God. God. We need not live for the approval of the world. Instead, let's live for the approval of God.

Let's live for God's praise so that we can be salt and light in the world, so that the church might become an embassy, a sort of outpost of the world to come, where the best of the world is redeemed for God's glory right now in the present.

How do we do that? Well, in a few weeks after we finish up our series in Revelation, we're going to begin a series in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount starting in, I think, sometime in July.

[ 40 : 19 ] How do we live God's will on earth as it is in heaven? How do we be the people of God's kingdom right now? That's what we'll be learning about as we look at the Sermon on the Mount.

But for now, as we close, we pray. We pray for God to fill our vision with our true future and our true identity, that we will share His glory, and even now we can reflect this glory in unity, in holiness, and in the presence of His Spirit.

Let's pray. Father, we see the glory that You have prepared for us, and we are humbled and thrilled at the same time.

And our hearts begin to realize the depth and the wonder of what Christ has done that could make us into a people like this, radiant with glory.

glory. So even now, Father, fill us with Your Spirit, renew our hope and our courage, and may we even now reflect this glory so that the world around us may see how great and awesome You are.

[ 41 : 45 ] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.