

Feeling Sexy?

Revelation 21:1-25

#41 in our series "The Gospel According to Jesus: The Revelation"

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Prayer

Thank you, Father. Lord God, this is our forty-first sermon from the Revelation. The Revelation is one incredible revelation so I pray that, through the power of your Spirit, you would bring all the pieces together. I especially pray for those who might be new to these Revelation messages. Help them not to get confused. May your Spirit help all of us to see you because it all means you; it's the revelation of Jesus. Lord Jesus, help us to see you and welcome you. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Message

Pastor Walter Wangerine wrote:

The woman sitting before me has a . . . problem so difficult to state that she twists her fingers in silence. She has come alone and looks . . . lonely.

"I'm sorry," she says. "I just don't know how to say it."

"Take your time," I say.

She smiles a small apologetic smile. "He," she says—she's referring to her absent husband. The problem is in their marriage. "Whenever we, ah, make love," she says, dropping her eyes . . .

As though she has just made up her mind, she says the sentence smoothly: "Whenever we make love, he laughs." She looks up. Her eyes question me.

"At you?" I ask. "He laughs at you?"

"No. Oh, no." Now she is concerned that I don't misunderstand. "No, he laughs for joy."

This is what she thinks the problems is . . . her husband's pleasure at entering her . . . He laughs like a boy at a new joke; the tears run down his cheeks and he kisses her.

"Does the noise distract you?" I ask.

"I don't think so," says the woman. We're talking about her feelings now, so she drops her eyes again and twists her fingers. "I," she whispers, blushing: "I sort of giggle with him. He's having so much—" Her poor face blazes with embarrassment; her voice falls to a distant whisper, "—so much *fun*, you know. But that isn't right, is it? Isn't he being, I don't know, disrespectful, like laughing in church? And then, when I laugh too, I feel so—guilty."

She feels shame . . . some of you feel it right now . . .

We each have a deep thirst that we often cover up, and then, deny.

We try to satiate the thirst with all manner of things that don't satisfy, things that make us even more thirsty, and then, in self-conscious fear, we refuse to acknowledge the ever-increasing thirst; we feel shame.

Maybe, it's alcohol... it satisfies for a few hours and then makes us even more thirsty, addicted, unsatisfied and ashamed.

Maybe, it's pornography, adultery, greed or just old-fashioned power... it seems to complete us for a moment, but it transforms us into beasts instead of men; it turns us into harlots instead of brides.

Maybe we try to satiate the thirst with our own "good deeds" and that turns us into Pharisees that crucify the Christ in order to justify themselves.

In Genesis 2, God makes humanity and says, "It's not good that the Adam is alone..." But Adam is alone in the presence of God, who is Love . . . That means the Adam doesn't know that Love is Good and God is His Helper, our Husband—our *ezer* in Hebrew.

Over and over, in the Old Testament, we read that God (*EI* in Hebrew) is our Helper (*ezer* in Hebrew)... *Eliezer* means God is helper. Never is a woman said to be a man's *ezer* or a man said to be a woman's *ezer*. Adam, as male and female, is a reference pointing to our *ezer*—our Helper who is made fit for humanity.

So, get the picture? Adam is alone in the presence of God because Adam is not thirsty for communion with God . . . He doesn't know the Love that is God. He does not know that Love is Good.

Genesis 2:21 "So the Lord God caused a deep sleep (*tardemah*) to fall upon the Adam—humanity."

I'm not entirely sure what to make of this, but we really don't read anything about God waking *the Adam* from this *tardemah*, this deep sleep, until Isaiah prophesies that God will wake Jerusalem.¹

Isaiah 60:1 "*Arise shine for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you...*" And then Isaiah goes on to prophesy the most incredible things about Jerusalem—all things that John sees, and we will read, here at the end of the Revelation.

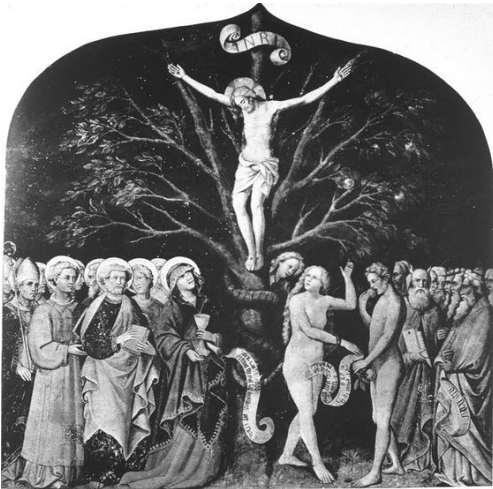
Paul quotes Isaiah in Ephesians 5:14 saying "*Anything exposed to the light becomes light.*" Therefore it says, '*Awake oh sleeper and rise from the dead and Christ will give you light...*'"

The Bible talks as if we're all still asleep, and this entire fallen world is like a nightmare—a nightmare we are having as God performs surgery upon our souls.

Adam is not thirsty for Love, who is our God, and so God puts the Adam to sleep.
And from His bleeding side He forms Eve—His Bride.
Adam *is* thirsty for Eve . . . and Eve is thirsty for Adam.

Genesis 2:24 *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh.”*

In Ephesians 5:31 Paul quotes this verse and then writes, *“This mystery is a profound one and I am saying it refers to Christ and the church.”* Paul taught that Christ is the *Eschatos* Adam, the ultimate Adam, and we are His Bride.ⁱⁱ Adam and Eve are thirsty for each other, and God will create a thirst in humanity for Himself.



In the middle of the garden, there is a tree.
It's either two trees that look just the same and are in one spot.
Or it's one tree, that to us appears to be two.

On the tree is the Judgment of God.
On the tree is the fruit of the knowledge of Good—and God alone is Good.
And on the tree is Life; It's the tree of Life . . . and Jesus is “the Life.”

Genesis 2:25: *“And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made.”*

The serpent (the Ancient Dragon) tempts Eve...
She is a picture of the Bride, who is us.
She sees that the Fruit on the tree is Good for food—but she doesn't see that the Good in flesh, who is the Life, who hangs on the tree . . . is her Helper.
Scripture calls Him the *Eschatos* Adam, or “last Adam.”
Well, Eve takes the Fruit and gives some to the first Adam.ⁱⁱⁱ

Gen. 3:7-10

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin cloths.

They covered that place on their body where they would experience communion in the covenant of marriage producing life...

They covered that place where they would complete each other.

They covered that place where they would thirst for each other, that place that was to teach them of their thirst for God.

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. . .

[“In the presence of the Lord there is fullness of joy. At his right hand are pleasures for evermore,” Writes David in Psalm 16.]

And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” And Adam said, “I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.”

A pastor went to visit one of his parishioners. He rang the doorbell, waited, and no one came. Finally, he took out his card and wrote Revelation 3:20 on the back, and slipped it under the door: *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in.”*

Two days later the pastor received his calling card back in an envelope with a brief note attached — Genesis 3:10: *“I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.”*

One year ago, we read the words of Jesus in Revelation 3:20: *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock . . .”*

- Why don't we open the door?
- Why don't we invite him in? He tells us what He wants— *“I will come into him and eat with him and he with me”*; He wants communion.
- Why *don't* we invite Him to fill every dark corner of our souls so every breath we take is the ecstasy of unadulterated, passionate surrender?
- Why don't we invite Him in?

Maybe we think that He's like a pastor making house calls.

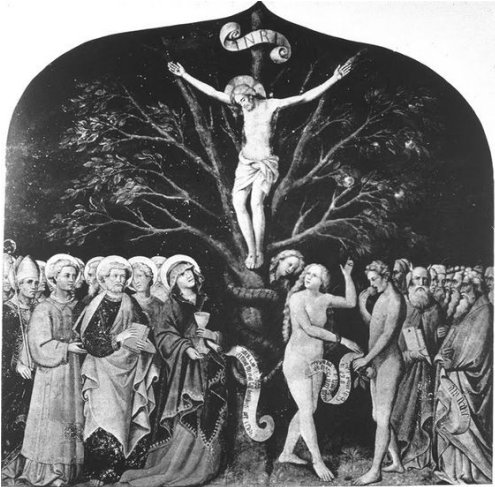
Maybe we think He's a thief in the night; when in fact He's the Bridegroom and we're His Bride.

Maybe we can't imagine that He's actually attracted to the very places that we long to hide

Maybe we can't imagine that He actually longs to fill that very place with His glorious presence, which is Himself, and He is Love.

Why don't we invite Him in?

Because of shame. . . And we have reason for shame.



We took knowledge of the Good from the tree.

We take knowledge of the Good so we can take good things and make ourselves in the image of God.

- Alcohol is a good thing . . . anything created by God is a good thing, but it's the way that we take it that makes it a bad thing.
- Gold, jewels, houses, and cars are all good things; but the way we take them makes them bad things.
- Sex is a good thing, but the way we take it can be the worst thing.

We've all tried to satiate our thirst for God with things and turned those things into idols. We've taken Good things... and even worse we've taken "the Good" as a thing.

When we take knowledge of the Good, in order to make ourselves in the image of God.

- We don't receive the Good as the Life that He is.
- We take the life of the Good as a law, which reveals that we're dead.
- We crucify the Good—take the life of the Good, and then, we perceive His presence as nothing but condemnation and criticism.

That's the story of Israel, Judah, and Jerusalem.

Through the law, God reveals: *"Israel, you've become a beast." "Jerusalem, you've become a harlot!"* But it only drives Jerusalem deeper into the dark, into the closet, and she *will not* open the door and let Him in.¹

Husbands, you know that if you really want to make love to your wife, criticism isn't the way to go. She may commune with you 'cause it's her duty; she may honor you with her lips but her heart will be far from you.

Jesus said, "This people—Jerusalem—honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." He was quoting Isaiah, who goes on to say, *"Therefore, I will again do marvelous things with this people"* (Isaiah 29:13-14).

Hosea 2:14: *"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, romance her, entice her, and bring her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her, and there I will give her vineyards; there I will make the Valley of Achor [Valley of Trouble] a door of hope."*

Jesus is the Door; His broken flesh is the veil that's torn in this wilderness world. He is the Door that brings you home to yourself, your God and all things with Him.

In Ezekiel 16, God speaks to His whoring Bride Jerusalem saying: *"Yet I will establish with you an everlasting covenant... that you may be confounded... when I forgive you all that you have done"* (Ezekiel 16:60-63 RSV).

Well, if you didn't follow all of that, I'm saying that the Spirit of God whispers to you from behind the veil, in the tabernacle of your soul.

He whispers:

Just peek outside your walls—just beyond the gate of your city.

You'll see a tree in a garden, and you'll see a Man standing at your door.

He has wounds on his body that match wounds in your soul.

And He has a wound in His side that will remind you of home.

Don't run from Him; listen to Him. The Man says to you:

You took my life; but from the foundation of the world, I've given you my life.

You've sinned against me, but I have always been Grace to you.

You've dreamt that you are your own creator, savior, and redeemer.

You've dreamt that you are your own helper.

You've dreamt that you are a harlot, but now awake and look in my eyes:

¹ A child wrote in a school paper, "The Jews were proud people, and throughout history they had trouble I think he meant "Gentiles," but I hope he got an "A" . . . because he was right.

In Acts 2 the problem with the Jews was . . .

An uncircumcised heart, the unsympathetic genital of the soul;

A heart unfeeling, sealed off to God, Hiding in the dark, hiding in the bushes...

The law was criticism driving them deeper into shame.

You are not a harlot, you are my Bride. And . . .

Now would you open the door; would you drink from my fountain?
Would you thirst for me, as I have always thirsted for you?

Once you did not know, but now you do know:
It's not Good for you to be alone . . . and I am your Helper.
Awake Oh sleeper and rise from the dead and I will give you light...
I am the Light, and I make *all* things new.

Short clips from *The Passion*, *Snow White*, and *Inception*

Scene 1: Under the weight of His cross, Jesus is covered in blood wearing a crown of thorns; He reaches for His mother with deep compassion, clutches her face, looks into her eyes, and says, "See, Mother, I make all things new." She gazes at Him in wonder. Jesus stands up and once again picks up His cross; He then embraces it.]

Scene 2: Prince Charming bends down, kisses Snow White and awakens her from a dream.

Scene 3: Ariadne: (Sitting across from Cobb and a coffee shop, Ariadne looks around bewildered) *We're dreaming?*
[The "reality" surrounding Ariadne and Cobb crumbles to pieces.]

Scene 4: Dorothy: (mumbling) *There's no place like home. There's no place like home...*

Aunt Em: *Dorothy - Dorothy! It's me—Aunt Em. Wake up, honey.*

Dorothy: *No place like home—there's no place like home*

Revelation 21:1-2

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also, there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned [kosmeo] for her husband.

Last week, we began preaching on this text and titled the sermon "You Can Go Home."
I made the point that home is being at home with "I Am" at home in you.

I talked about my dad and my home in Littleton growing up...
And I mentioned my bride coming down the aisle.
And now I need to tell you that home, for me, is Susan.

I mean that in a very physical way.
And I mean that in an emotional, psychological and theological sort of way.
I rest in her, and I think: "This is where I belong."

John writes that He sees the New Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven like a bride adorned for her husband... Jesus is her husband. The word translated “adorned” is *kosmeo* in Greek. It’s where we get our word “cosmetics.”

In Revelation 19, we read, *“The bride has made herself ready, it was granted to her (given to her) to clothe herself with fine linen bright and pure. The fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints”* (Rev. 19:7).

In John’s day, when a young man would desire to marry a young woman, he would prepare a covenant and present it to the young woman’s father along with the bride price (what the young man would pay the father as compensation for losing his daughter).

Jesus pays for us with His very life.

The young man would then pour a cup of wine, which represented a blood covenant—the Life is in the blood. If the girl would drink from His cup, the wedding was sealed. They were engaged.

At that point, he would go to prepare a place for her in his Father’s house. It was the custom that he would come for her at an unexpected hour and take her to her new home, where they would consummate the wedding, and everyone would celebrate for an entire week.

While he was preparing a place for her, she would be using the gifts that he had sent to prepare herself as a place for him. She used his gifts to purchase the fine linen, bright and pure... and cosmetics: perfume, oil, and flowers, with which she would adorn herself for him.

And you see, it all sent a message:
“I’m thirsty for you, my groom.”

When my bride walked down the aisle she was clothed in fine linen... or rayon; I’m not sure... but it was bright and pure... She had her hair all done up in flowers and her cosmetics were just right. It all meant that she was thirsty for me. And, in a very real way, I purchased that thirst for me, with my love for her. I had romanced her for five and a half years... and made her “thirsty.” I had waited for five and a half years, not perfectly, but I had/we had waited.

We waited because of my neurotic desire to make myself Good—which really isn’t good, but bad. We waited because I wanted to make myself good, but also because I had simply come to trust that God is Good—and that’s good, but not to my credit; that was a gift He had given to me.

Well, I'm just pointing out that I was thirsty for her.
And Her adornment said, "Peter, I am thirsty for you."
And that's what the Groom wants.

I was not thinking about cake as I watched her walk down that aisle. I was thirsty for her, and just her, hidden under that adornment. You know Scripture says that we are to be clothed with Christ. He is our adornment.

I was thirsty for her without any adornment but me.
I was thirsty for her, and a particular part of her . . .

That very part of her that she had hidden from everyone else in shame,
That very place in which she felt incomplete.
That very spot which looks like a wound, left from the day, that God made the
Adam male and female,
That very place where I had been made fit for her, and her for me.

I longed to fill that empty place in her self, with my self.

"This mystery is a profound one and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church,"
wrote Paul in Ephesians 5. *"Christ and his church"*—which is you, His Bride.

Now, even as I'm preaching this, some of you feel intense shame, and you're starting to hide. Male or female, you're all Christ's Bride, and you each have an empty place. And you've tried to fill that place with all sorts of things and just become more and more aware that it's still empty.

I've tried to fill the empty place in me with Susan...

- Susan is good, and Susan's body is a sign, but something inside Susan is the substance. (I can't take it as a possession, but I can receive it as a gift).
- Wine is a sign, but the Spirit of Christ is the substance.
- All creation is a sign, but our Creator is the substance.
- Signs fade and get old, but the substance is eternal.

We argue about legitimate and illegitimate signs:

Like if and when a photograph or art turns into pornography.

Or when a romance novel turns into coveting your neighbor's husband?

Or whether or not a divorced person who re-marries can still reflect the sign?

Or whether or not homosexuality can reflect the sign—scholars debate just what the biblical words mean: do they mean pederasty and idolatry, any same-sex attraction, or something in between?

And what about singleness? Jesus was single, but does He thirst for a bride?

Well, we argue about the signs, and I don't know the answer to all those questions... but I know that the presence of God is the substance.

- And I know that we're all thirsty for communion.
- And I know that we're all thirsty for communion in that very place that you were just now tempted to hide . . . from Jesus . . . your Bridegroom.

Now stop and listen for a minute:

Maybe Jesus is attracted to that very place, in you.^{iv}

And maybe His greatest sorrow is that you'd hide it from Him.

It doesn't matter if it's wrong or right; if you hide it from Him, it's evil.

And so, His presence burns like fire.

"Shame is like that," writes CS Lewis. "If you will accept it—if you will drink the cup to the bottom, you will find it very nourishing: but try to do anything else with it and it scalds."^v

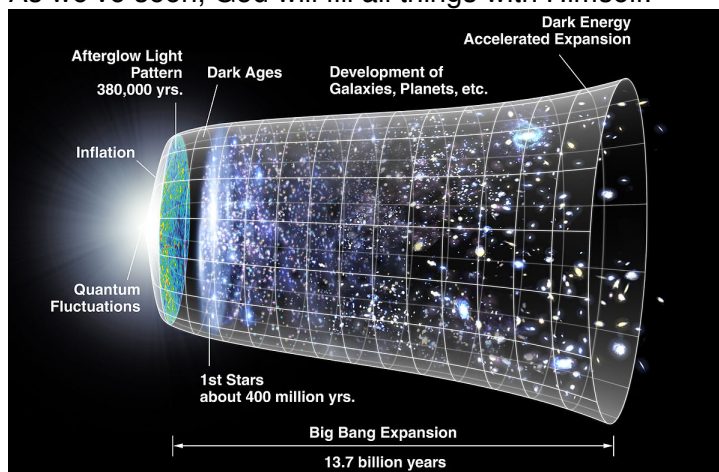
In the same way, if we confess our confusion, lies, and decay, those empty places will reveal The Way, The Truth and The Life... but not as something we've earned—but as the thing they truly are, the Grace of God, which is the presence of God, which is Jesus—at His right hand are pleasures forevermore.

I just remember how terrified I was of my nakedness as a child—older than three or four years old (after I'd gained the knowledge of good and evil)—and then, how amazed I was that someone as beautiful as Susan would actually be attracted, even thirsty, for the very place that I had always hidden in shame. What a delightful discovery!

Well, John saw the New Jerusalem coming down... as a bride adorned (*kosmeo*) for her husband; it means, she's thirsty.

Kosmeo, comes from *Kosmos*, it's the idea that God orders and beautifies His creation.

As we've seen, God will fill all things with Himself.



He will fill every eon, with His meaning—His Logos.



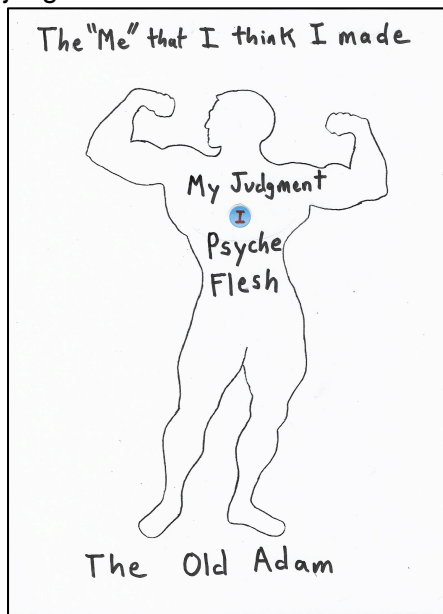
And He will fill every moment in your life with Himself.

[Image of a human life illustrated as an undulating snake with five stages: a baby, a youth, a man, an old man, and a coffin.]

He saves you, not just in three dimensions, but at least four.

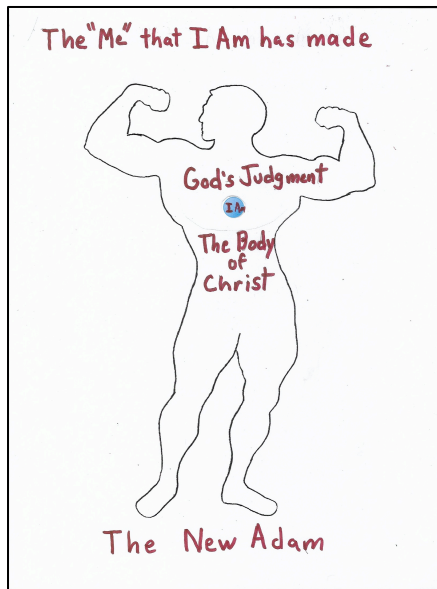
He transforms all your moments past, present, and future and in that way makes you in His image.

As we've learned, we each have an old man that we think we have created with our judgments.



It is who I am *not*. That man is my nightmare: the result of dreaming that I could make myself in the image of God by taking knowledge from the tree and choosing to apply the Good to myself in the strength of my own flesh. We each have an old man.

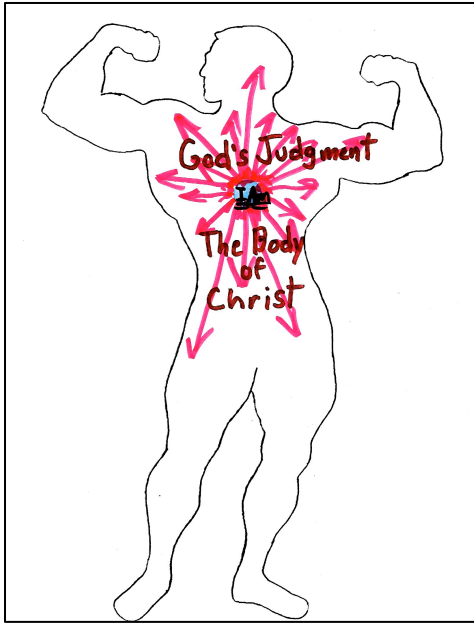
And we each have a New and Eternal Man that God has created with His Judgment.



He actually is God's Judgment... He is somehow "Christ in me".
He is the Good and He is the Life, not taken but given, even for-given from the foundation.

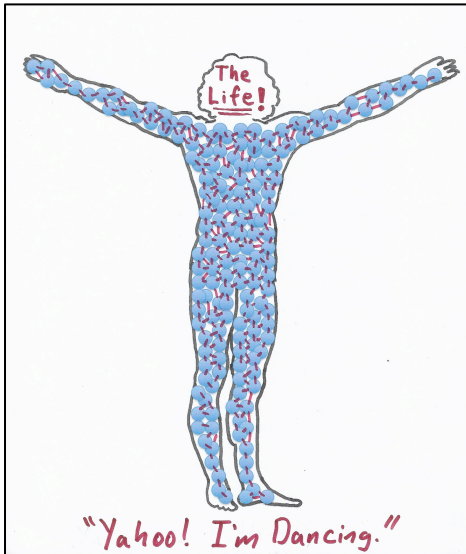
You know? The moment you confess your old man, He becomes your New Man.
The moment you confess your lies, they become a beautiful testimony to the Truth.
The moment you confess that you're lost, you are most found by the Way.
The moment you confess that your dead, it is the Life Himself that's rising in you.
The moment you confess your old man, the New Man is revealed in you.
The New Man is the Way, the Truth and the Life; He is Christ in you.
"This is the mystery hidden for ages and generations," wrote Paul, "Christ in you..."

To the woman at the well who had had six men, and to whom Jesus was the Seventh Man, the *Eschatos* Adam—Jesus said, if you would ask of me, I would give you a fountain of living water welling up from inside of you unto eternal life.



When we “ask of Him,” He fills us with Himself.
And His Eternal Life, becomes our Eternal Life, in the very place we once experienced temporal death in this world of illusion.

And you know this, at least those of you who are over forty or fifty years old . . .



The signs get old and fade but the substance is eternal.

I’m saying that God in Christ Jesus wants us to agree with our own creation, the way a bride agrees to her honeymoon on the night of her wedding.
He wants us to agree, not only once, at camp in junior high.

He wants us to agree, in every moment of our space and time—*past, present, and future...*

- That every moment would be a moment of ecstatic, passionate and free communion—constantly willing what we want and wanting what we will
- That everywhere, and everywhen we would be entirely at home with Him at home in us
- That we would thirst for him as he has always thirsted for us.
- That we would love Love... forever in His image.

Not because we stole His identity but because we received it as a Bride.

Imagine if Susan came down that aisle, looking just like me in clothes that she stole from me . . . and when the minister said, “Do you take this man?” she said: “I am this man,” and produced a fake ID that claimed that she was me?

To steal your identity is death and sin, but to receive it is salvation by Grace through faith . . . and faith is thirst for your Helper.

Revelation 21:2 -7

Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.” And He said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes (nikao conquers) shall inherit all things...

Remember this whole vision has been begging the question: “How do we conquer?”

The thirsty conquer and inherit all things.

...thirsty for what?

...the fountain of the water of Life—the Life who is our Bridegroom.

“This is the victory that conquers the world, our faith,” writes John in 1 John.

See what that means? It means that faith is thirst. And so, of course, the Bridegroom wants faith and arranges all things to grow faith..

Sometimes I wonder if this whole God and Jesus thing is working. But if they want thirst... it's working. Is this world making you thirsty for the Way, the Truth and the Life? Your Bridegroom is the Way, the Truth, and the Life... and all for free.

Your Bridegroom is Grace.
Have you become thirsty for Grace? Grace is relentless Love.
He's making you thirsty.

Sometimes I wonder why God does miracles, and then, doesn't do miracles?
Why He gives us a taste and then makes us hungry?
Why He gives us a sip and then leads us into the wilderness?

He's making us thirsty.
The adulterous generation is thirsty for His signs...
But the Bride is thirsty for Him; He is the substance.

He withholds His glory and power so I wouldn't try to abuse or try to rape His person.
And He withholds His glory and power because He refuses to abuse me . . .
He refuses to take me against my will, and so He romances my will until I surrender my will to His Will... until I surrender to the thirst. That's the glory and power of Love. Love creates all things—even that thirst for Himself called faith.

Do you remember what Jesus said as He hung on the tree in the garden just outside the walls of Jerusalem? He said, "I thirst"^{vi} (all Judah could give Him was vinegar—sour wine). Then He lifted His eyes to Heaven and said, "It is finished," and He delivered up His Spirit.

- That Spirit fell on a Roman centurion and he began to worship; he was thirsty; he drank and he was drunk by Love. (Song. 5:1)
- I know that Spirit fell on His disciples in the old Jerusalem on Pentecost and they began to worship; they were thirsty; they drank and people thought they were drunk... and they were drunk with love and by Love.
- Within a generation the walls of the old Jerusalem came tumbling down, and John saw a New Jerusalem (she's made of people) coming down; she's made of people that are thirsty.

She's made of people that are thirsty for Grace.
We're saved by Grace through thirst—a thirst for Grace called faith.

You know this; your heart knows it. Two weeks ago, Karl Wheeler had us finish this sentence, and write it on a piece of paper, which we placed in a bucket. This was the sentence: "Because of Grace I am free from the shame of _____."

He then read our responses.... rejection, pornography, addiction, anxiety, despair etc., etc. When Karl would read a slip of paper, was there something in you that just wanted to find that person, hug them, "And say, thank you, thank you, thank you. I love you. God loves you. And it will be OK!"

That something in you that was attracted to that place of surrendered shame in them is Jesus. We are the Sanctuary, where we celebrate communion, in the Covenant of Grace.

You see? You shouldn't just surrender your shame to anyone. Every one of those confessions could've easily been abused. You must surrender your shame to Jesus... who sees it as the treasure that it is (a pearl of great price).

There was one slip of paper that took my breath away. It read, "Because of Grace, I am free from the shame of thinking I'm better than others." I wanted to find that person, wash their feet, and say thank you, thank you on behalf of us all.

Do you remember the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus?

The way Jesus tells the story makes it rather clear that the Rich Man is Judah, father of the Jews—and Jesus was a Jew. And the poor man was Eliezer, Abraham's servant who you'll remember ends up in Abraham's bosom.

Eliezer was a gentile who lost what he would've inherited had Abraham not had a son, and become the father of Israel and the Jews. Eliezer is the Hebrew name for Lazarus. *El* means God and *ezer* means help. Lazarus means "God is Help."

You may also remember that Judah, the rich man, ends up on the other side of a chasm tormented by a flame.^{vii}

He seems to have thought he had justified himself, and so didn't need Grace, and so looked down on Lazarus. He thought he was better than Lazarus . . . and so, was not saved.

The Church is the Israel of God, and sometimes I fear that we're not saved, and we still need to be saved, for to be saved is to be thirsty for Grace. If you've experienced much Grace, you'll want Grace for all. You'll be thirsty for God to make all things new.

Rev. 21:6-8

Behold I make all things new and He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes (nikao conquers) shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral (pornos, sorcerers), idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and the iron, which is the second death." That's the death of death.

Cowards must not be thirsty enough for Love, for perfect Love casts out fear. Unbelief is un-thirst; perhaps they're full of themselves. The murderers are not thirsty for the life.

The liars are not thirsty for the truth... or at least much truth.
Whores and whoremongers are not thirsty for Love that can't be bought.
Idolaters are not thirsty for Yahweh, "I Am, that I am."
Judah was not thirsty for Yeshuah, Yahweh is Salvation, Jesus.
And the rich man sure wasn't thirsty for Jesus in Lazarus.
He wasn't thirsty for God is our Help, Eliezer.

Judah and Jerusalem believed that they had justified themselves. Jesus said, *"Many will say to me on that day, did we not do many mighty works in your name? And I will declare to them 'I never knew you.'"* Jesus doesn't know your false self, but the moment you surrender that false self in Truth, you become the New Self by Grace.

In the outer darkness at the edge of the eternal fire that surrounds Jerusalem...the rich man gets thirsty. And Jesus said, *"To him who thirsts, I will give of the fountain of the water of life without payment."* (21:6, 22:17)

Lazarus can't cross the chasm. But on the cross, Jesus, the king of the Jews, destroyed the chasm. Every valley is exalted and every mountain and hill laid low. When Jerusalem sees Him as He is, a fountain is opened with her, and she opens her gates and the King of Glory comes in.

He will save the whole house of Israel including Judah.
He will save all that fell asleep and died in Adam.
He will create in all of us a thirst for Him.

But you are particularly blessed if He has created a thirst for Him, in you, right now.
I often complain about the thirst, but I need to be grateful for the thirst. The thirst is a gift.
I didn't create it, but it is creating me.

I'm thirsty to see the Way, the Truth, and the Life fills all the lost, the liars, and the murderers with Himself.

I'm thirsty to hear the addicted confused and insane, join the chorus of praise because the Logos of God, the Logic of Love has filled them with songs.

I'm thirsty to see every empty void of sin filled with the liquid gold of Grace.

I'm thirsty to see Adolph Hitler washing the feet of six million Jews because he wants to because it is his heart's deepest desire.

And I'm thirsty to see six million Jews placing a crown on his head because in him they recognize the presence of their King who conquers all things... even Hitler and Judas.

I'm thirsty to see Jesus conquer all things and make all things new.

And if you're not . . . I pray for your soul, that the King would make it new and make mine new too.

I'm thirsty, but not near thirsty enough.

I'm thirsty until someone cuts me off in traffic, criticizes my sermon, or really needs my help when I'd rather just watch TV. See a thirst for Grace will manifest as deeds of Grace, like a beautiful white wedding gown.

Over the years, Susan and I have prayed for several women that have been ritually abused. It's really weird and wild and yet, all strangely familiar, for we are all Eve, and we have all been abused by the ancient dragon.

Seventeen years ago, when I first preached on this text, we were praying for a friend who forty years before had been ritually wed to Satan... and literally imprisoned in a closet.

We discovered that she was delivered from evil, by seeing "the epiphany of His *parousia* (2 Thess. 1:9)—Jesus in every moment of her space and time. He would reveal Himself in her memories... He had always been there.

She and Susan both would see Him in visions, and the manifestation of His presence in all those places of shame would transform those places of shame into the Gospel of Grace—stories of God's relentless love for her everywhere and everywhen. And it would free her from oppression, fear, and despair.

In these visions, Jesus would often hold up a mirror. She had been sold as a harlot for a time. But in the mirror, she could see that she was Christ's Bride for all eternity. She would see herself adorned as a bride for her Bridegroom.

At one point, she bought a wedding dress. We had her hang it on her bedroom door. When she did, and she looked at that dress, the ancient serpent could not enter. Of course, it wasn't the dress; it was her thirst for Jesus, which is a gift from Jesus and the presence of His Spirit.

"To the thirsty... the one who conquers... I will be his God... And he will inherit all things," says Jesus.

Don't be a foolish virgin; know what it is that the Bridegroom wants.

He wants a bride thirsty for Him, and for Him alone.

He doesn't want a bride that wraps herself in flannel and makes him some tea.

He wants a Bride that dances into the bridal chamber and gladly, boldly, freely, and lavishly, surrenders her shame.

He wants a Bride that thirsts for Him as He has always thirsted for her.

Communion

And so, in Jerusalem, on the night He was betrayed by all of us, He took bread and broke it saying this is my body given for you. And He took the cup saying this is the covenant (it's a marriage covenant) in my blood; drink of it all of you.

Are you thirsty?

Or are you offended?

Perhaps you're thinking, "Hey that wasn't much of a Christmas sermon."

If so, you appear to have forgotten just where it is that babies come from.

In all of Israel, this may have been the most shameful place of all [Peter points to a manger on stage]: a food trough, in a stable, just outside the walls of Jerusalem, in Bethlehem.

Jesus was born to a poor, unwed, teenage, peasant girl and placed in a manger.

There are four women that Matthew listed in Jesus' family tree.

The first is Tamar, who disguised herself as a whore to convince her father-in-law Judah to impregnate her with his seed.

The second is Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute from inside the walls of Jericho.

The third is Ruth a desolate woman from Israel's ancient enemy Moab.

The fourth is Bathsheba who committed adultery with David.

And then, Mary... and all we really know of Mary is that she was very thirsty for the presence of the Lord; she prayed, "*May it be unto me according to your Word.*"

This is God's Word and He's attracted to you . . . even in—especially in—that place where you feel shame. You know the place; maybe it's several places. Let's give those places to Him. Those places are wherever you want to hide from Jesus

Let's pray. Jesus, you're my Helper and so I give you my shame.

Benediction

God's love for you in your place of shame makes you beautiful or you are not beautiful, but you *are* beautiful, so Jesus holds up a mirror; what you see in His mirror of Grace—the Gospel—is not wishful thinking; it's eternal. Believe the gospel, in Jesus' name.

[Peter prays a closing prayer thanking God that He covers us from all shame.]

ⁱ For a long time, I've found it very curious that in Gen 2:16 God literally says to the Adam, "*Of every*

It's made me wonder, did Adam take fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil ("you will not eat," said God) or did Adam dream that he did? When, in fact, he was eating from the tree of Life all along.

I must be careful here, but is death and this whole fallen world like a nightmare that God is allowing us to dream, and wonder of wonders, in Christ Jesus, God enters our dreams and wakes us from those dreams. This fallen world may be a dream, but the wounds on Christ's hands and feet are real; they come from the temple in Heaven.

ii And this is "the mystery hidden for ages and generations," Christ in us. (Col. 1:26-27)

iii The first Adam sinned when he took the fruit from Eve; humanity, as male and female sinned, by taking knowledge of good and evil to justify ourselves. But the last Adam did not sin, and yet He "became sin for us..." He freely chose to suffer with His Bride—not to make Himself good, but because He *is* Good; He is the Good in flesh.

iv Sexual imagery is universal in human religious experience. But when the living God, in whose presence Moses had to remove his shoes, is presented as a cuckolded husband who relentlessly pursues His wayward wife, some Christians have protested that this is not only an outrageous symbol but a blasphemous one. Why? Because the prophet Hosea is implying that God doesn't just care for His people; Hosea implies that God is sexually aroused in the presence of His people. And that idea was shocking to the Jews, scandalous to their neighbors, and it remains an enormous stumbling block for Jansenists and neo-Manicheans in our own day.

Are you aware that in the fourth century A.D., the Christian community borrowed and assimilated the spring fertility symbol of the Roman Empire and put it into our Easter liturgy? At the baptismal rite of the Easter vigil, a lighted candle is inserted into a vase of holy water to symbolize that when Jesus Christ rose from the dead He consummated His union with His bride the church. . . .

Have you ever been sexually aroused to an intense degree? Really stimulated in a sensuous way? Passionately turned on? Both the Scripture and the liturgy of the Christian community say that human sexual arousal is but a pale imitation of God's passion for His people. That is why human love, though it's the best image we have, is still an inadequate image of God's love. Not because it overdoes it, but because human desire with all its emotion cannot compare with the passionate yearning of Jesus Christ. That is why saints can only stutter and stammer about the reality, why Blaise Pascal on his famous night of fire, November 21, 1654, could not speak a word, why Bede Griffiths wrote, "The love of Jesus Christ is not a mild benevolence; it is a consuming fire." - Brennan Manning, *Lion and Lamb - The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus*

v The Ghost made a sound something between a sob and a snarl. "I wish I'd never been born," it said. "What are we born for?" "For infinite happiness," said the Spirit. "You can step out into it at any moment. . . ." "But, I tell you, they'll see me." "And hour hence and you will not care. A day hence and you will laugh at it. Don't you remember on earth - there were things too hot to touch with your finger but you could drink them all right? Shame is like that. If you will accept it - if you will drink the cup to the bottom - you will find it very nourishing; but try to do anything else with it and it scalds." Almost, I thought the Ghost had obeyed. Certainly it had moved: but suddenly it cried out: "No, I can't. I tell you I can't. For a moment, while you were talking, I almost thought . . . but when it comes to the point. . . . You've no right to ask me to do a thing like that. It's disgusting. I should never forgive myself if I did. Never, never. And it's not fair. They ought to have warned us. I'd never have come. And now -

please, please go away!" "Friend," said the Spirit. "Could you, only for a moment, fix your mind on something not yourself?" - C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*

^{vi} Israel, His vineyard, would only give him sour wine—vinegar.

^{vii} Song of Solomon 8:6

*Set me as a seal upon your heart,
as a seal upon your arm,
for love is strong as death,
jealousy is fierce as the grave.
Its flashes are flashes of fire,
the very flame of the LORD.*