

It's the ultimate backup plan. When all else fails it's built to survive some of the worst situations you could ever imagine - from national conflicts & global meltdowns, to rising sea levels & power outages. Whatever calamity you can dream up, this is the ultimate backup. It's a doomsday vault, located in the far reaches of the Arctic and it's known as the Global Seed Vault.

The Vault is managed by an international group called the Crop Trust - it's very real. It "has the capacity to store 4.5 million seed samples from around the globe, shielding them from climate change, wars, natural disasters and other threats." At first it may sound a bit extreme, but the Vault is there because "almost [everything] we eat has its origin in [those] seeds." It's the ultimate backup "for our morning slice of bread, for our morning coffee, [or perhaps] our afternoon tea." The Vault is so important that over the past 12 years "half a billion dollars in total has now been invested by governments and the private sector."<sup>1</sup>

At one level, it's enough just to know the Vault is there. At one level, it's enough just to know that whatever happens we have backup to survive. It's enough to have it, and to pray - please God - we never have to use it. But here's the interesting thing. The interesting thing is that just sitting around as the ultimate backup is hardly the main reason the Doomsday Vault is there. It's not just there waiting for a global meltdown. It's there to help us now in the changing &

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2016/04/15/why-the-world-is-spending-half-a-billion-dollars-to-protect-humble-seeds/>

challenging conditions of our world.

According to the Crop Trust, “The [challenge] these days is that the plants that are the basis of our food are not able to adapt as fast as the climate is changing.” So we need the Vault now if we’re going to thrive, if we’re going to breed new plants and find new resources in the changing & challenging conditions of our world. And at that level, it’s not enough just to know it’s there for a meltdown someday. We need it now if we’re going to live our lives today. It’s the kind of work that has to be done. Thankfully we have the resources. The great tragedy would be just sitting on it, instead of using the Vault now to fight hunger, to promote health, and to heal some of the brokenness in our world.

From Revelation: *In the spirit he carried me to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city coming down out of heaven from God. (Rev 21:10)*

At one level, today’s vision from Revelation is tucked away at the end of Scripture like the ultimate backup. At one level, John’s vision of the new Jerusalem is enough. It’s enough, at one level, just to know that it’s there. In the midst of the world’s conflict or trouble, in the midst of suffering, uncertainty or pain - it’s enough to know there’s a backup for the life to come. It’s enough to have it, and to trust - please - that God will use it when the time comes. But here’s the interesting thing. The interesting thing is that just sitting around as the ultimate backup is hardly the main reason this vision of new creation is there. It isn’t there just to survive a global meltdown. We need it now if we’re going to thrive and to live our

lives today. No less than a Doomsday Vault tucked away in the edges of the Arctic, this vision of new creation is here to help us in the midst of a challenging & changing world.

Let's see how it works. Our main clue arrives in the middle of John's vision. It arrives in the middle of his description of this heavenly city; a city that sounds utterly familiar but also entirely new. It's a city of light, without any lamps. It's a city of gates, without any locks. It's a city of worship, without any temple. Because John says twice, both at the beginning and the end of his vision, that God himself is the light and the life and the peace of this city. God himself is personally present, and everyone who lives there will see God's face.

That's the vision he describes. Then mysteriously, he describes a river flowing from God's throne "through the middle of the street." And "on either side of the river is the tree of life with its [fruit]... and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations," (Rev. 22:1-2). A river & a tree in the middle of a street. That's our clue for seeing Revelation as something more than a backup for the world to come. A river & a tree for the healing of the nations. That's a clue that we need Revelation now in the changing & challenging conditions of our world.

Because Revelation is the conclusion of a story that begins in Genesis. It's the conclusion to those opening chapters in Genesis with a garden, a river, a tree and some fruit. If Genesis describes the beginning of our brokenness, then Revelation describes the beginning of our healing. Almost everything we hope for

in Christian faith finds its origins - its seed - in those waters of life and those leaves of healing. At one level, sure, maybe it's enough to know that God's healing is there as some kind of backup someday. But Revelation is so much more.

Revelation is meant to bring health and healing in our world today. It's there because our world needs to be nourished and healed already. As we hear in the Psalm, creation is longing for God's "way," God's blessings & healing, "to be known upon earth," today (Psa. 67:1). It's the kind of work that has to be done.

And the promise of Easter is that we have the resources, because new creation has already begun in the life, death & resurrection of Jesus.

That's what our other readings are all about. Our other readings - the Gospel of John & the Book of Acts - pick up the same image of these waters of life to show us that's God's healing & new creation meets us already in the person & the Spirit of Jesus. Look how the image of those healing waters & new creation gets worked out in both readings.

Our reading in John begins with a lame man by some waters in the midst of his weakness and pain. The great tragedy isn't just that he's lame. That's bad enough. What's even worse is that he's been living on the edge of those waters without any healing for years. Until Jesus arrives and meets him with the health and the healing of new creation. Jesus "does what the pool stood for but what it hadn't been doing very [well]."<sup>2</sup> And right there, on the edge of those waters, Jesus

---

<sup>2</sup> Wright, *John for Everyone*, p. 56

himself brings new life and healing into the midst of this man's suffering and pain.<sup>3</sup>

In the book of Acts, Paul and some friends are on a journey that leads them to a river, where they supposed there was a place of prayer (Acts 16:13). The women they meet on the shore of that river, are Gentiles - called "worshippers of God" - who hail from other nations and other lands. And right there, as they pray on the shore of that river, a church itself is born. That small gathering of people itself becomes a tree of healing for the nations of the world. The church itself becomes a source of healing and new life.

You see, once we have that vision of new creation fixed in our hearts & in our eyes, we shouldn't be surprised if we discover heaven's life coming to meet us already and to heal us in any nation or any land. The message we hear after Easter is that any pool or any river, any community in any land can become a source of new creation to heal the world. And that should be a great encouragement for us as we gather week by week in our worship and in our prayer. Because whenever we gather, we're invited to become a source of God's life & God's healing through the Eucharist & through our prayer. That's what it means to be the church. In the resurrection we become a source of new creation. It's the kind of work that has to be done. The promise of Easter is that we already have the resources in Jesus. The great tragedy would be just sitting on a vision new creation, instead of allowing God to use us to heal some of the pain & the brokenness in our world. *Amen.*

---

<sup>3</sup> Burrige, *John*, p.75