

Easter 4C; Good Shepherd Sunday; Mother's Day 08 May 2022

Revelation 7:9-17

St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth

Greg Bensted

'Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen' (Revelation 1:4-6).

*After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" Let's pray:*

Wonder and awe electrify John's soul as he gazes upon the Eternal, seated on his throne, flanked by the angels, the elders, and the four living creatures; all themselves genuflected in worship singing, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." Then one of the elders approaches John and asks him, "Who's this mob?" before answering himself – "they've come out of the great ordeal, and they belong to Jesus."

The point of all existence is the throne of God and of the Lamb. God is the centre of everything and he enjoys being surrounded by his new creation. All who are born again live in him, inheriting all the blessings of eternal life in their union to Christ and their fellowship with him. They derive all their light from God and they reflect it back on him, giving all the glory to him from whom they received grace upon grace. He who built heaven, he who supports heaven, he who chose every inhabitant in heaven, he who fashioned every inhabitant for heaven, he who bought every inhabitant of heaven with his precious blood, he who is the Father of all and the Friend of all, is the centre of all joy and all worship in eternity.

And by his side is the Lamb. The Lamb who was slain, Jesus the sufferer, Jesus the crucified, Jesus who died for sin and has buried it forever by his blood.

Saints, while we're still here, let's keep this splendid vision uppermost in our hearts and minds. Let's devote ourselves more to heavenly contemplation. Let's keep Christ at the forefront of our thoughts, our conversations, our actions. Let our main attraction be God upon the throne; Christ the Lamb upon the throne. Let's live and practice here, what will be our superlative pleasure to live forever in the hereafter - worshippers doing homage before the throne of God and the Lamb.

The throng that surrounds the throne are, "a great multitude that no one can count." This speaks of God's social character. He was God over all blessed forever, self-existent, independent, needing no creature to assist him, or to add to his glory or happiness. Yet, he chose to create worlds. God willed community. He delighted in making this planet and he fit it out to be the dwelling place of living creatures.

God happily created all sorts of beauty and life, from the tiniest cell that considers a drop of water an ocean, to the leviathan that makes the ocean its playground. God delighted in creating the eagle to fly in the sky, the manta ray to glide the deep waters, and the horse to gallop the vast plains. All these creatures he has fed from the beginning, and he looks upon all with interest and compassion. What a wondrous creation! What a boundless Creator!

Then God thought to himself, "I'll make a creature different from all the rest I've made. Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness." And God made a strange creature, altogether unique—part of which was taken from the ground and part spirit, made in the image of God. So, he made us, and despite sin, which seemed to rob God of all his newborn children, God is surrounded by a multitude, too numerous to count, who are nearer to him than even the angels, brought into wedded union with his Son, Jesus Christ.

Saints, I find it mind boggling to contemplate the communal character of God. He willed to share himself, to not be alone, to surround himself with ten thousand times ten thousand spirits whom he ordains to bless.

Another thought comes to mind. There will be a multitude surpassing all human arithmetic, out of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues in heaven. John saw variety in the divine circle. I like this. The very charm of nature is its variety. Imagine if all flowers were alike. Where would the glory of Spring be? And if all bodies in the resurrection world were precisely the same, wouldn't the very beauty of heaven be diminished. Yet, there they are

from different nations, and peoples, and tongues, and this I believe gives us hope that we will know each other in heaven.

Another point to note is that they 'are standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.' That they're standing means that they're firmly established, secure. They won't slip, trip, stumble, or fall.

Standing before the throne. It's the posture of action, like soldiers ready for the march—like servants who "Go," when told to go. Saints, how I want us to adopt this same posture now. To stand firm in our conviction whatever the trial. "Lord, hold us up that we may stand firm in faith, that we might stand with loins girt ready for whatever you bid us do."

They stand in the immediate presence of God beholding and absorbing his grace and glory. They stand before the throne. This is the delight of heaven, to dwell in the presence of God, forever to behold his face, forever to stand in the very court itself, inside the veil, before the throne, within the glorious mystery, in the Holy of Holies, right there with God.

Think of the time when you will be presented in that complete robe of glistening white. Pure and without fault before the throne of God. White to distinguish the priestly order; remember, you are kings and priests in God's kingdom. White, the emblem of triumph, for you will be victors over every foe. White because Jesus bled and dyed your robes with his own blood.

Oh! the joy of being there! May it come to us soon! Sudden death will be sudden glory! Departure out of this life, entrance into life eternal. The shutting of these poor eyes, the opening of noble optics to the glory of heaven. Saints, don't be afraid to die. Rather, be willing at any time to lay down your weary head and die, and awake amidst the white-robed multitude taking in the glory of God's face.

I wish I had the ability to describe this glorious circle—that multitude shining in glory before the throne, the apostolic troupe, the goodly fellowship of the prophets, the camaraderie of the martyrs, the ministers and confessors of Christ, our own kith and kin who have gone before us - and listen to how they sing their song of praise! Oh! if we could receive John's vision of all that's there. If it were possible, I'd willingly transfer you all to heaven at once—from

the Church to the Temple, from this place where we sing his praises at his footstool to the throne where we'll sing them to his face more sweetly and with greater gusto!

This great multitude who surround the throne of God sing with loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Evangelical Lutherans every one of them. They were all sorts on earth, hundreds of millions of them from all denominations, but Lutheran when they get to heaven, singing, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" That's what Luther preached, what Augustine preached, what St Paul preached, what Christ would have us preach, and this is what they sing in heaven, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

They sing in heaven that it was God who planned salvation, God who ordained them to salvation, God who gave them salvation, the Lamb who bought their salvation with his blood, all of God that salvation hinged on, and all of God who perfected their salvation. It was his free grace that called them to come and love the Saviour, Jesus.

Salvation is heaven's song—all of the grace, all of the glory, from beginning to end, belongs to God alone. Saints, it's our song too, because it's the burden, the joy, and the theme of our ministry from cradle to grave, 'For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—' (Ephesians 2:8; see also Romans 1:17).

Saints, tell people that they don't have to save themselves; Christ has already saved them. They have only to trust Jesus and they are saved. There's nothing for them to do and nothing for them to be, but simply let Christ be all in all to them.

Father, grant us the faith, the will, the strength, the courage, and the desire to teach them to sing, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ the Lamb forever. Amen.