**Ascension Sunday – Year C – May 12, 2013 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Revelation 19:11-16 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**“Let’s make a bet… on the rider on the white horse”**

***11*** *I saw heaven standing open* *and there before me was a white horse, whose rider* *is called Faithful and True.* *With justice he judges and makes war.* ***12*** *His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns.* *He has a name written on him* *that no one knows but he himself.****13*** *He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood,* *and his name is the Word of God.****14*** *The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen,* *white* *and clean.* ***15*** *Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword* *with which to strike down* *the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter."* *He treads the winepress* *of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.* ***16*** *On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:* *KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.*

So which horse are you betting on in this weekend’s Preakness? Orb had a wonderful come from behind third- to-last-place run to win the Kentucky Derby and is the favorite in Maryland this Saturday. The media spends a lot of time and energy reporting on the horses, but what about the jockey? Didn’t Joel Rosario have an important role in Orb’s Kentucky Derby win? So far this year he’s earned over $7million. I’d say he’s a good bet.

But what about the horse and rider in our lesson this morning? They seem to be a good pair, too, don’t they? Notice that the focus is not so much on the horse. In fact, he doesn’t even have a name. But all of the focus is on the rider. Who is this rider on the white horse?

The Apostle John, one of Jesus’ 12 disciples, is seeing a vision of heaven, and in vs11 he writes, **“I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is Faithful and True.”** This jockey has a couple of names, and they describe his character: Faithful and True. This rider must be someone who always tells the truth and is faithful to their word, someone who always keeps his promises. John then writes, **“With justice he judges and makes war.”** If this rider goes to war then the horse must not be a thoroughbred but a war horse. And this rider isn’t so much a jockey, but a warrior. Since he judges with righteousness he must be someone who always judge correctly. Unlike the governments of the world who decide to go to war for any and every reason, this warrior’s judgment is always in the right. He always goes to war for the right reasons.

In vs12 John writes, **“His eyes are like blazing fire.”** A jockey who steers his trusty steed through the pack has to have good vision to see the gaps and see the finish line. This warrior sees everything. He sees the hearts of people. He knows what they are feeling and thinking. **“On his head are many crowns**.” The Bible tells us that at the end of time all kings and princes, all governors and rulers will have to hand over their crowns – for at the end of time all rulers and kings will have to acknowledge that this warrior has all rule, all authority, all power over all of the kingdoms and nations on earth.

And besides all power, “**He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself**.” How could we adequately give a name to this king who holds all power, all knowledge, who is faithful and true and judges with righteousness?

John sees that this warrior king is “**dressed in a robe dipped in blood... the armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.”** What kind of king does not send his Soldiers into battle to fight for him, to do his dirty work? But he, the king, rides into battle all alone. He alone has the remnants of war on his uniform. He alone does all the work and fights against the enemy and rides away victorious.

John sees the weapon this warrior uses, “**Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword… his name is the Word of God.**” This king apparently did not use weapons of mass destruction, but the sword of the word from his mouth to cut down his enemies. What kind of warrior king can do that? With just his voice, his Word, this king exercises total domination on the field of battle.

**“He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.”**  In John’s day grapes were cut from the vine and then dumped into large wooden tub. Slaves would then stomp on the grapes with their feet until the juices ran out and the gardener could begin the fermentation process to make his wine. This rider stomps on his enemies until they are pulverized beneath his feet, and there is nothing they can do to stop him. Since he treads with the fury of the wrath of God Almighty, we know this rider is divine.

Tattooed on his thigh and embroidered on his robe, the rider on the white horse has yet another name to describe him, **“KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”** This rider on the white horse, the Faithful and True, the Word, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the victorious warrior king, this is our Jesus.

Since this is our King, since he has all might and rule and authority, since this is this track record, he is a winner, and if I were a betting man, I’d bet on this rider on the white horse. But it’s really not a bet, because there’s no chance of losing. It’s a trust, it’s putting my full confidence in him that he will rule, that he will win for me. Since he is this warrior king, then why does it appear that he is not controlling the world issues we have today? Why doesn’t he sweep down on his white horse and destroy the Taliban and al Qaida? Why doesn’t he ride into the capital cities of Syria and Iran and North Korea and show them that he is in charge? And if appears that he is not doing anything about these bigger world issues, then he must not have time or power to deal with my “smaller” issues.

Since he has all power, then why doesn’t he help me, when I’m looking for the strength to do what is right in God’s sight? Rekindle a marriage on the foundation of Scripture, exercise patient love for my children, be a better steward of my finances, a more courageous witness for Christ, the strength to stand up to those who oppose my faith in my king and his Word – I look to him for the power to do these things. But when the results are slow, or when I don’t see any outward evidence, then I wonder if I can put my trust in him to help me.

Since he has all power, then why doesn’t he help me when I am drowning in depression, suffering in my body, and racked with the pain of guilt from past mistakes? Again, maybe I look for results and don’t see them happening as quickly as I’d like, perhaps I don’t feel any better, and I question the king.

I doubt his ability to do anything about it, so I look to other places to help me in my struggles. I seek the advice of friends who merely tell me to look inside myself to find that strength, I look to the bottom of a bottle to ease my pain, or I don’t do anything at all, but wallow in my pride, because I am too proud to ask for help.

The Bible tells us, **“No king is saved by the size of his army;** **no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse** **is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save**.” (Psalm 33:16-17) Who are we going to bet on? Ourselves or our king? Will we put our trust in our own ability to pull ourselves up by the bootstraps to figure out our issues? And will we look to ourselves to deal with our bigger problem of sin, and a relationship with our king that is tainted because we’ve placed ourselves and our own power ahead of his? Like the gambling addict who continues to go to the racetrack betting window, and wins once in a while, but in the end has nothing. Is that us? It will be if we continue to bet on ourselves.

Quick trivia question: who is the winningest horse racing jockey of all time? Russell Baze, who has 11,839 wins out of over 50,000 starts, and he’s currently active. That’s impressive. But in spite of his track record we wouldn’t bet on him at every race, because he won’t win every time. But the rider on the white horse does. He wins every time. You can bet on him to win. He will win, because he has won the victory already. Because he is not a horse jockey, but a warrior king, who comes with power and authority, the power and authority of his Almighty Word. And even though he uses his Word to crush his enemies, he uses his Word to bring healing and forgiveness, and the power to lift up and to show love.

With one Word he defeated his enemies on the field of battle. Jesus cried out from the cross, “Tetelestai!” Just one word in the Greek… in our language, “It is finished!” With that one word he signaled to the enemy that they had lost, and that the king had won. By his sufferings and death, Jesus, our warrior king, defeated sin and sin’s ability to accuse us of guilt. For Jesus our King suffered our guilt. He allowed the wrath and fury of God to trample him in the winepress, and to crush him and to cause his blood to spill, to spare us from God’s wrath and fury. Jesus, our King, satisfied God’s wrath. No more suffering for sins, no more death and punishment for sins needs to be made, “It is finished!” Jesus destroyed your sin and mine and with that one powerful Word told us it is done.

With his Word Jesus our King proved that he is the victorious rider on the white horse. **“Peace be with you! Look at my hands and my feet! It is I!”** With these words Jesus greeted his disciples on Easter evening. With these words Jesus proved that he had trampled death under his feet and that he lives. He lives so that death may no longer haunt you and the grave will not keep you contained forever. Since he has all power over death and grave, with his voice on the Last Day he will cry out. And you will rise from your graves to say, “Look at my hands and my feet! They are new again! It is I! I live again no more to die!”

With his Word Jesus our King proved that he is King of kings and Lord of lords. Before he ascended into heaven he said to his disciples, **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”** Yes, because he won the victory over his enemies, he ascended to glory and sits at God’s right hand and rules the nations.

With this vision of our ascended and victorious Lord Jesus, your King wants you to know, that even though evil may sometimes seem to rule in this world, in the end, He will punish them and he will win. He will get his revenge and crush them in the winepress of God’s fury and wrath. Even though evil may seem to prevail, we must wait patiently for our King to ride to earth, knowing that he will win, and so will we.

With this vision of our ascended and glorious King, Jesus wants you to know that you will look to him for power when you are struggling to renew your marriage, more faithful and patient love for your children, a better steward of your finances, a more courageous witness for Christ, the strength to stand up to those who oppose your faith in your king and his Word – you will look to him for the power to do these things. When you feel like you are drowning in depression, suffering in your body, and racked with the pain of guilt from past mistakes, you will look to him and his powerful Word for healing and forgiveness and love. He promises it. He is Faithful and True. He is the Word. While we wait for him, we will still suffer, we will still hurt, but in the end, we know that the King will bring us, victorious, home. Will you bet on him? The rider on the white horse? Well… it’s not so much a bet, as it saying, “I will put my full trust, my full confidence, my life, everything that I have in him, because he wins, every time, and so do I.”

Jesus, come quickly to take us to be with you. Amen.