**Revelation 5:11-14** May 5, 2019

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Easter 3

*Revelation 5:11Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. 12In a loud voice they sang: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” 13Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!” 14The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**You Can Contribute Nothing; You Owe Him Everything**

Back in 1980, during the Cold War, the US Hockey team won the Olympic Gold Medal. Remember? Some of you do. Some of you may remember through Hollywood’s re-telling of that tale in the movie, *Miracle*. It was amazing. One thing about that movie – all the hype, all of the cheering when the US hockey team won the gold medal—Hollywood did not exaggerate. Every American, even those who had never watched a game of ice hockey in their life (and this then-ten-year old boy was one of them) thought of those hockey players as national heroes.

What was that moment for you? When have you cheered the hardest? When did you give a shout and a fist pump? When did you jump out of your chair and spill the popcorn?

That cheering is our Bible reading. It isn’t a stadium of 20,000 or 80,000, but ***“thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand!”***. Millions! What a cheer! What is going on? It is a special vision of heaven that our Lord Jesus gave to his beloved apostle, John.

There have been times in the last 2000 years when it felt like the Christian Church was on the edge of a cliff, like it was doomed. About 700 years after Christ, Muslim conquerors rode out of Arabia and conquered nearly ½ of Christianity in less than a century. Perhaps it feels the same these days when nearly every single Christian denomination in our nation has seen dropping church membership and attendance over the past two generations. Are we on the wrong side of history? --Ah, there we go again, thinking that God is not in control.

About 60 or 70 years after Jesus, at the time of the Apostle John, the Christian church had some of the same thoughts. The force of the Roman Empire was now being brought to bear against the Christian faith. Sporadic persecutions were erupting. Popular opinion was turning against this Christian faith that disrupted Roman morality. Would they survive?

It was these persecuted people who first received this last letter of the Bible, Revelation. What we call the book of Revelation was Christ’s gift to people running low on hope. Maybe more than any other, this book of the Bible is written to give hope. (And this summer in our Sunday Bible studies, we will be studying the hope the book of Revelation gives. Please plan to be part of that!)

In Revelation, Jesus gives the Apostle John – one of the three chief disciples, the disciple whom Jesus loved – Jesus shows him the future of heaven and earth. The vision starts with God himself summoning John: *“Come up here, and I will show you what must soon take place.”*

Instantly John is transported the throne room of heaven. He sees God the Father on the throne of heaven. Around him, from the outside in, are a crowd of countless angels, then 24 elders and finally four mysterious beings only called “living creatures.”

Seated on that throne in the middle of the crowd, God holds a scroll. The scroll is sealed. This is the message John has been summoned to hear. *“But”* John says, *“no one in heaven or on earth… could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.”* At first it sounds a little silly: crying because you can’t open a letter. But remember: this is the message he has been summoned to hear. Imagine a final message from a loved one, a farewell video in an encrypted format that you can’t open.

*“Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.”*  Which brings us to our reading.

***“Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: ‘Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”***

Praise be to the Lamb. In heaven, John looks and sees an unexpected source of hope. Not a warrior or a king, a Lamb. And not just any lamb, but a Lamb that looks like it has been slaughtered; it’s wounds still visible in the perfect holiness of heaven.

Every Christians knows who this Lamb is and why he looks like he has been slaughtered. One of our hymns sings,

*Crown him the Lord of love -- Behold his hands and side,  
Rich wounds, yet visible above, In beauty glorified.  
No angel in the sky Can fully bear that sight,  
But downward bends his wond'ring eye At mysteries so bright.*

Praise be to the Lamb! His glory even in heaven ***“for ever and ever”*** (13), will be that he has died for us. Jesus did much while on earth. But his foremost glory is that he died to pay for our sins. He did what we could not. He opened heaven’s doors. All who accept that fact as truth, will one day sing with those heavenly hosts.

Therefore John hears the hosts of heaven sing, ***“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”*** Then, from outside the confines of heaven, all creation echoes ***“every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing*** ‘***To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, forever and every!’ ”*** The heavenly beings in turn respond: ***“The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.”***

What a glorious sight the apostle saw! What a glorious sight we see! But then we turn our eyes away from this heavenly vision to our own world and what do we see?

There was a man who had an interest in music. One morning he woke from a dream with the most delightful melody he had ever heard. And it wasn’t just in the dream. He could remember it after his dream. He could hum it. He got out of bed and decided that he would have his breakfast and then commit this treasure to paper. After breakfast he sat down… and it was gone. He sat there and tried to remember, but couldn’t. Gone!

As we turn our eyes from John’s vision, with all heaven and earth praising Jesus, and turn to look at our earth, the song of heaven is dashed to pieces. This is a world which lives in opposition to God. And I hear people agreeing, what with all the bombings and fighting and shooting. But that’s not what I mean. These aren’t the problem. Those are only the symptoms of a disease much deeper. The deeper disease is that people simply do not give honor and praise to God. This is where all evil starts.

So many have no time to submit themselves to God. It is a world full of selfish, self-centered people who sometimes do nice things, but always on their terms. Who can help their neighbor, and are fine with God if his will happens to be going in the same direction as their will. But when they hear God’s clear condemnation of sin—homosexuality or anger or drunkenness—well they think that is just old-fashioned hatefulness, unrealistic expectations. Suddenly they are wiser than God! They imagine that they do God’s will, but never inquire what that will is.

Even within the church of Christ, how well do we, us here, reflect what John saw? Can we sing without a hint of hypocrisy, ***“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”***

When we worship our God on a given Sunday, we feel pretty good. But next week, when we consider God’s command for regular worship, well, we did our part last week and there are so many other things we want to do and get done. Besides, couldn’t I just catch a religious podcast or turn on one of those entertaining preachers. Is that what the Scriptures mean when they say, ***“Worthy is the Lamb to receive… glory and praise…”***?

I am patient with the cashier who had a troublesome customer in front of me, and I feel pretty good about myself that I am a Christian who is acting like a Christian. But give me somebody I have a “right” to be angry with, and when God tells me that my anger with that person is a sin, I want to ask God, “But didn’t you see what he just did?”

There are some Christian parents who teach their children this bedtime prayer: “Jesus Savior, wash away, all that has been wrong today.” It is daily preventative medicine against the disease of hypocrisy. Against the greatest hypocrisy of all: thinking that we have done pretty well in the last twenty-four hours, when we are, in fact, poor miserable sinners. We will never live a day when this prayer is not in order at the end of it: “Jesus Savior, wash away, all that has been wrong today.” Every day we must confess that we have not lived out the song John heard in heaven. We have not rendered to Christ what is due him.

Remember, the Lamb wasslain. He was slain so that the sins, even of believers who should know better, were forgiven. So when we have prayed to Jesus to forgive us, we can go to sleep resting sure of God’s favor.

That is why the Church of Jesus Christ sings now and into eternity, ***“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and… honor”*** and all the rest of it. Worthy, indeed. We can contribute nothing to God to save ourselves. We find that we simply must give everything to God’s service.

How can we think of this? It brings to mind something I saw this week.

Seventy percent of college and university graduates have a significant amount of student debt. Many, most will conscientiously pay that debt off. Maybe five years later, maybe 20, they will finally pay off that debt. When they are done, they will celebrate. They will breathe a sigh of relief, give a round of high fives, go out for a meal. For all those years they felt enslaved. They never felt free to spend money, but always had to first check with the debt monster and beg a few pennies. Truth be told, they hated that debt. They resented its hold on their life. In the end they paid back not a penny more than they were legally required to.

Sadly, that is how so many Christians think of their lives for God.

This past week I saw some other people shelling out money for higher education. They were having a great time of it! I was at a scholarship dinner where hundreds of thousands of dollars were handed out to dozens and dozens of college-bound students. It was amazing to see people put their own money out there, their family’s money, for others. These givers were so grateful for what they had, that they felt compelled to give.

Two different groups of people paying for higher education, but with two completely different mindsets. One serving the slave master with resentment, the other joyfully sharing.

The Christian who serves God resentfully, giving no more than necessary to maintain membership, I don’t think they have taken to heart what John saw in heaven. They haven’t seen the Lamb who was slaughtered, who paid for every bit of our sin, who has revealed God’s will to us. He is the one of whom we say, even as the brass-toned, felt bottom collection plate comes our way and we put a percentage of our income in that plate, ***“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive”*** it all. Amen.