

“Worship – Now and Then”

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Readings:

Revelation 7:9-17

In this morning’s reading from John’s Revelation we catch a glimpse of the future and how the present is linked to that glorious day when we shall be with Jesus and we shall be like Him.

We are invited to take hold of the vision of the hope that we have for today and tomorrow, for all who are in Christ Jesus.

This Revelation of St. John was written to his churches, as a pastor to his people.

The revelation is written to speak to the lives, the struggles, the worship, of God’s people.

The verses we read from Chapter 7 are from a vision of worship.

Chapter 7 begins in verse 2 saying:

I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to damage earth and sea, saying,

“Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads.”

And the number who were sealed was 144,000 not an actual number, but a symbolic number. A number which means all God’s people are sealed.

It is the sealing that the Apostle Paul speaks about in Ephesians 1:13 &14:

“when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him (meaning Jesus), were marked with the seal of the promised Holy spirit; this is the pledge (or the guarantee) of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory.”

St. John in Jewish poetic style reiterates the number again in vs.9 *“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”*

What are they doing in heaven this morning?

They are worshipping around the throne of God.

They are doing what we are doing.

We are gathered around the throne of God.

The throne of God is at the centre in our worship.

And gathering around the centre, centres our lives.

Our eyes are lifted from self-pity and selfishness,
from worry and anxiety, to the Lord who reigns
over all powers and authorities.

We are doing in this church, this morning, what the
saints of God are doing. Maybe we are not quite a
great multitude beyond counting, and we are not
from *every* nation, and *every* language.

But that day will come, when we will blend our
voices with theirs, for we have all been sealed with
the promised Holy Spirit, we are marked for that
gathering.

And in this place, this day, we are in choir practice,
worship rehearsal for what is to come.

Our voices here blend with those heavenly voices
above, and one day we will hear that great chorus.

This great gathering, this multitude beyond
counting, from every tongue, tribe and nation,
wore one outfit; white robes, white baptismal
robes.

The Elder told St. John that “those robed in white were those who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

The “ordeal” is life; our lives lived in the midst of evil, in the presence of forces that oppose Christ and his rule.

The ordeal is earthquakes and famines, wars and violence, hatred and greed, injustice and evil, all that denies God, and cries out for unbelief and rebellion.

Those who have kept the faith, who have held on in hope, entrusting themselves to God and to the Lamb, come and wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb.

They came, as we come to the Baptismal Font; with all the stains of life still clinging to us, our imperfect stumblings and bumbblings of faith and doubt, faithfulness and faithlessness, but we come.

And in the blood of the Lamb we are made clean, our robes are washed white and we take our place at the throne, shouting;

“Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

And singing.

People who worship, sing. Christians sing in prison cells, in storms, in hospital rooms.

Miriam sang, Moses sang, Debra sang, Jesus and his disciples sang, Paul and Silas sang.

In the church's life hymnbooks are prayer books.

The last word in worship is amen: “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.” (Rev. 7:12)

Eugene Peterson in his book “Reversed Thunder says:

Amen means "yes". It is the worshiping affirmation to the God who affirms us. God says yes to us. We respond to his yes by saying yes, amen. Worship is affirming. The end result of the act of worship is that our lives are turned around. We come to God with a history of nay-saying, of rejecting and being rejected. At the throne of God we are immersed in God's yes, a yes that silences all our noes and calls forth an answering yes in us."

When we Christians say or sing or shout, "Amen", God hears our unequivocating assent to his irrevocable yes to us, the Yes to our redeemer Lamb, the Yes of our Creator King. Many a congregation when it assembles in church must look to the angels like a muddy puddly shore at low tide; littered with every kind of rubbish and odds and ends-a distressing sort of spectacle. And then the tide of worship comes in, and it's all gone: the dead sea urchins and jellyfish, the paper and empty cans and the nameless bits of rubbish. The cleansing sea flows over the whole lot. So we are released from a narrow selfish outlook on the universe by a common act of worship."

Worship centres us, and worship heals us.

This Revelation of John's shows us what our worship here really is, it holds up a mirror for us of what we are doing now and what will come.

It paints for us in poetry and image what the promises of God are for us now and how they will come to completion in the fullness of time.

In worship we are renewed, given hope and life, and strength to carry on.

And we hear the promises of God that say;

“For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (Rev. 7:15-17)

Does that sound like something you want, to be given to drink from the springs of the water of life, for God himself to wipe the tear from your eyes, for Jesus to shelter you so that you will hunger and thirst no more?

This is not just a future hope, but a present promise of God for today.

It comes as we choose to invite God to Shepherd us day by day, and follow his voice and his ways, seeking God’s kingdom.

If we seek God, if we are attentive to what God is doing in our midst, if our focus is on God’s work and will, we will find it.

But it is a choice, every day, every moment, we can choose to seek God and God's kingdom, we can choose humbly to trust that God has got us, that God's ways are wise, that God will shelter us, that God will feed us and we will hunger and thirst no more if we seek God and his ways.

We will say with the Psalmist; "The Lord is my Shepherd, there is nothing I lack."

We choose to worship, to answer God's thunderous yes to us, with our daily, hourly moment by moment "yes" and Amen to God.

And we are changed... we are fed, we are sheltered, God meets us, even wiping the tears from our eyes.

Thanks be to God.