

10th Sunday After Pentecost Revelation 6:1-8 and 7:9-17

Today we continue with week 3 of our series on the Book of Revelation. We began with the letter to the seven churches, followed by John of Patmos being snatched up to heaven in a vision and finding himself in the throne room of God where God sits on the throne of judgment. Last week left us with the question of who is worthy to open the scroll sealed with the seven seals that is in the hand of God the Father? It is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David who is worthy to open the scroll. This is Jesus and when John looks he sees Him looking like a Lamb standing, as if slain.

Jesus takes the scroll of the deed of all the earth from the hand of God, claiming what is rightfully His. Heaven erupts in praise to the Lamb. In silent anticipation, everyone waits for the Lamb to break the seals on the scroll. In today's reading, the scene shifts from heaven to the events about to take place on earth. All heaven awaits in anticipation of the judgment about to be poured out on the earth.

Last week you were introduced the four interpretations that have been used to unravel the mysteries of the Apocalypse, which if you recall, translates to Revelation from the Greek.

The **Preterist** or past interpretation understands the events of Revelation in large part to have been fulfilled in the first centuries of the Christian

era - either with the fall of Jerusalem in the year 70 or at both falls of Jerusalem in the first century and of Rome in the fifth century. The book was used to comfort Christians, who suffered persecution from both the imperial cult and Judaism.

The **Historicist** school views the events of Revelation as unfolding in the course of history. This perspective was especially compatible with the thinking of the Protestant Reformers, who equated the papal system of their day with the Antichrist.

The **Futurist** interpretation argues that the events of Revelation are largely unfulfilled, as they await the end times for their realization. If the Preterist interpretation has dominated among biblical scholars, then it may be said that the futurist reading is the preference of choice among the masses.

The **Idealist** viewpoint, by way of contrast to the previous three theological insights, is hesitant to pinpoint the symbolism of Revelation historically. For this school of thought, Revelation presents timeless truths concerning the battle between good and evil that continues throughout the church and through the ages. Revelation is about one thing and only one thing: God wins and the powers of evil lose. And at the end of all things, God will make "**all things new**," not "**all new things**." Consequently, all will live in a vast city together; Jews and Christians and Muslims, and all others. Even the once nasty kings of the

earth will find their place there. Yes, even tele-evangelists, who will be very surprised to see who their neighbours will be!

The key to the purpose of God's life for the world does not consist of power; conquering does not mean victory in any traditional sense. It means that the slain Lamb is the key to life's meaning, thus the Book is often referred to as the "Revelation of Jesus Christ." So, what is the most meaningful and logical way to interpret the visions represented in the scrolls, for us would be the **Idealist** view.

Jesus Christ is the triumphant redeemer who governs the entire universe from the throne. The seven horns and seven eyes symbolize perfection and Jesus' complete authority, omnipotence, and omnipresence in the world. He holds the future, the scroll in his hands. Now the Lamb moves into action and breaks the seals one by one.

As each seal is broken, we get more insight into what the future holds – although not necessarily as a chronological sequence of events. In today's continuing reading of Revelation, we see the first four seals on the scroll opened. The Lamb breaks open the first seal on the scroll and John says that one of the four living beings surrounding the throne speaks the word, "Come."

John looks, as the white horse stood before him and the rider of the horse had a bow in his hand and a crown was given to him. Who is this

white horse and rider? There are two, which points to a later chapter of Revelation where Jesus is riding on a white horse on his way to destroy His enemies and to set up His millennial kingdom.

The accepted interpretation of the majority of theologians view the first horse and rider representing a false peace that is to come upon the earth. This false peace is ultimately delivered to the world by the Antichrist. This means that before the horrific terrors as the Tribulations begin, the terrors that ultimately lead to the battle of Armageddon, there will be a period of world peace. But this will be a false peace, a deceptive peace which will lull the world into a false sense of security and safety. This desire for peace will be used by the Antichrist, Satan's world ruler, to convince the world that he can give them the safety and security for which they so desperately long.

Jesus warned of this false peace that would come near the end, in response to the disciples asking for the sign of Christ's coming and the end of the age. Jesus said, "See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in my name, saying "I am the Christ, and will mislead many." Many would come claiming to be the prince of peace and mislead many. The final fulfillment of this is the rise of the Antichrist.

The rider has a bow, but no arrows, he is given a crown of victory or triumph, showing that he is honoured because his conquering is without bloodshed. He is not the real king, but has received the winner's crown

from the world for his victory in bringing peace, world peace to the earth. His conquest is not by force, but by deceit, his triumph will be a peace won by agreement, not conflict. Even as the world teeters on the edge of God's final judgment, the Antichrist will promise a golden age of safety, security, and prosperity and in response the world will honour him and elevate him to the position of leadership. Where have we seen this?

Jesus then broke the second seal, and the second living being said, "Come," summoning the second horse. This was a red horse, the colour of fire and blood and depicts war. God's judgment begins and the false peace of the Antichrist is shattered by war. All this is under God's sovereign control. God allows the false peace, and He brings an end to the false peace by bringing war on the earth. Some believe that the judgments of the Tribulations reflect the wrath of humanity or the wrath of Satan. This is not the case. The judgments reflect the wrath of God poured out on this sinful world. Jesus had described this time when He warned the disciples about false messiahs coming with false peace. "You will be hearing of wars and rumours of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom..."

Jesus then broke the third seal, and the third living creature summoned the third horse and rider with his command, "Come." The third horse was black and his colour denotes famine. Famine is the natural consequence of worldwide war as food supplies are destroyed, as we see happening

in Gaza. Jesus predicted famine. John tells us that the rider of the black horse had a pair of scales in his hand. This symbolizes the rationing that will take place due to the famine. This famine will be like none that the world has ever known, it will be worldwide and it will be devastating. What role will climate change play here?

When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, John hears the fourth living creature summon the fourth horse and his rider with the loud command, "Come." John saw an ashen or pale horse. The Greek word refers to a sickly green, or the colour of the skin of a decomposing corpse. It symbolizes death and we are told that the rider of this horse is named Death. Death on a massive scale is the consequence of widespread war and famine. Death is followed by his companion the Grave or Hades. Death claims the life of the physical body, the Grave claims the soul.

Authority is given, but it is not theirs. It is given to them by God to destroy a fourth of the world's population. This destruction would be done by sword, famine, pestilence and wild beasts. The war and famine were already on the scene having come in the breaking of the second and third seals. The fourth seal expands these conditions and adds pestilence which may refer primarily to diseases and epidemics which break out due to the war and famine, bringing death. But, it is broad enough to include natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, and fires.

The seals do not follow in chronological succession. Each does not belong to a particular time. Remember, for John the time between the first and second coming is short, and whatever happens must shortly come to pass. So the vision deals with the whole history of the church and the world throughout the Christian age. The vision provides no details of particular wars, diseases, slaughters, or difficulties. Everything has been described in general terms. The symbols represent forces that have been with us all the time. We all know them, and all generations before us knew them too.

The suffering and destruction of the first four seals are overwhelming, and so we turn to the following chapter of Revelation, a timeout that John uses to lift the vision of God's people from the difficulties of the present to the glories of the future. God gives us a panorama of salvation and the evangelistic activity of this period known as Tribulation.

John gives us a preview of the way things are to be. What he sees is a vast international, multi-racial, multi-lingual throng of people so great that no one could count it. The people he sees wear white robes and carry palm branches. The robe is an important piece of clothing in the Bible. It signals not only outward clothing, but reveals who the person is, what her or his status is. And so, the prodigal son is given a new robe, not just so that he would have something clean to wear, but as an indication of his restored place in the family. Believers, then, wear the white robe of purity, which symbolizes holiness and heaven. They carry

palm branches as signs of victory and joy following war.

The martyrs “washed their robes and made them white with the blood of the Lamb.” Washing something in blood does not turn something white. But here the blood of the Lamb purifies the martyrs and takes away their sin, and so their robes are now white.

Believers stand before God's throne and worship God, who in turn, will shelter them. The word translated as shelter is the word that also is translated as dwell. God's presence will remain with them. In a world in which subsistence was the normal pattern of life, the vision of no more hunger or thirst is communicated at an intuitive level.

Those who find in John's Revelation scenes of blood and doom and destruction have not read the book for the metaphorical writing that it is. The key to life is service, a service that may lead to suffering and giving and dying. Little wonder that the Romans did not want John mouthing such things into a Roman world built on the “pax romana,” a "peace" insured by armies and fighting and glorious death. The Revelation of John, or Jesus Christ, contradicts the Roman view of the world at every turn.

In the final verse, John once more plays with language and images. It is the Lamb who will be the shepherd who leads God's people to the "springs of the water of life." "And God will wipe away every tear from

their eyes." The journey continues through John's visions by having given thanks to the one who has saved them and who provides everything needed for life.

Revelation does not distinguish between Jewish and Gentile Christians. John does not exhibit a particular tendency divergent with the universalism of the gospel. In the first four seals, the vision does not point to any particular period in history, nor does it describe any particular set of events in the near or distant future. Rather, it speaks of the situation in all historical periods. The description of natural disasters is not a preview of the end of the world, but a vivid way of saying that even nature itself will not sustain those who reject God's redemption in Christ.

John's Revelation is a great book of the promise of God to create a world where all have a place, where hierarchies disappear, where all live together in harmony and peace. No one should be allowed to make this book into a thing of scary fear, of partisan choice, of believing rightly lest you end in fire. No! It is a book of hope, founded in love, and the gift of the Lamb for all of the people of God.

Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God, our holy Friend, You allow us to share some of Your love for the world. While we are here praying for the world's healing, others are busy implementing that healing. When we are out there trying to give of our best, may others remember to pray for us.

We pray for the end of bitterness and violence in its many forms. Bless all peacemakers: those who negotiate between nations, or arbitrate within commerce and industry, adjudicate in family courts, defuse tensions in school grounds, and counsel conflicting parties within church denominations.

Let Your grace support those who fight with and for neglected people; those small ethnic groups with no political clout, those who face prejudice and discrimination of any kind, the little people who are being ripped off by the rich and unscrupulous, and the deserted wives or husbands who are raising a family alone.

Endow the merciful folk with Your sustaining grace; those who treat diseases, bind up wounds, support and help all refugees, feed the hungry, re-settle the homeless, care for the orphan, visit the prisoner, encourage the handicapped, watch with the dying and grieve with the sorrowful.

Endorse the work of this church with Your enabling grace. Keep it close to the agenda of Christ. Let us be joyful in worship, warm in fellowship, inclusive in outreach, open in decision making, humble and sensitive in evangelism, and gracious in our ecumenical endeavours.

Bless any servant of Yours who is keeping the faith against the odds: those without the encouragement of other Christians at hand, or without even a distant congregation that can pray their names with affection. Please let Your grace renew them daily, and may they know Your Spirit as Friend and Counsellor.

We pray for the effective, compassionate care of all who are diseased, or severely handicapped, including ailing members of this congregation. We uplift before You; Dawn Hill, Pr. Kristen Steele, and Josh, who was severely injured in a car accident and had to face surgery. Hear us Lord as we now lift up those people and those situations You have placed upon our hearts. Bless all who work in clinics and hospitals: surgeons, physiotherapists, nurses, physicians, oncologists, psychiatrists, dieticians, social workers, dentists, pharmacists and the staff of hospices for the dying.

Visit each of us with Your grace, loving Friend. Dismantle our fears, build up our faith, deepen our love, clarify our goals, sharpen our insight, widen our compassion, and open our minds to the new words You wish to speak to our situation.

We pray for the feeding of the hungry, the clothing of the destitute, the housing of the homeless, the reformation of prisoners, and the rehabilitation of those who have been addicted to drugs. Bless every agency, church or government, which is dedicated to the care of our disadvantaged sisters and brothers.

We pray for the church, for all denominations large or small, that we may love one another in practice as well as in prayer. We pray for Pope Leo XIV; ELCIC Bishop Larry Kochendorfer, ELCA Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry, Bishop Kathy, Bishop Anna, Anglican Primate Shane Parker, congregations and Bishops of the Moravian Worldwide church, Bishop Azar and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, Ascension Lutheran in Nelson, Mount Zion Lutheran in New Westminster, our sister congregation San Juan Camino d'Esperanze and Pastor Ana Maria Jara, and Holy Trinity Lutheran in Port Angeles. We pray for all deacons, pastors, lay leaders, musicians and volunteers.

We remember the city of Nagasaki, Japan, and its survivors or hibakusha (literally “atomic bomb-affected people”), as they gather in memoriam of the seventy-four thousand killed in the nuclear holocaust, 80 years ago on August 9, 1945. We join them in humble prayer that this be the last place for an atomic bomb to hit the earth.

Bring Your light over the war on the peoples of Palestine. End this annihilation of families and communities and a nation through famine, horrendous bombing, and occupation by Israel. Bring our world’s collective concern to light the lamp of Enough! Enough bombs, enough sales of weapons. Stop the genocide. We pray for peace. Lift up the voices of the victims and give the perpetrators ears to hear and hearts to break open. Help us to stop sowing the seeds of war that thrive in a land of death and more death, destruction, and more destruction. Your kin-dom is crying out for justice, wisdom, and mercy.

We see Russia’s leader meeting with the USA leader on US soil talking about Ukrainian soil and sovereignty without Ukrainian leaders present. We hear of children kidnapped by Russia, land seizure and occupation, bombing of infrastructure and civilian targets, which brings anguish and disbelief. Where is the right action and human caring in any of this? Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Holy Spirit, sweep through these battlegrounds and places of death.

Bring Your voice to the halls where leaders deliberate on people's lives. You can take in the horror and tumult and transform our sinful ways. Cloth us in Your passionate wisdom. Light the path out of this horror and utter degradation.

We pray for the thousands who are victims of natural disasters: extreme heat, floods, earthquakes, the beginning of the hurricane season with hurricane Erin approaching, continuing wildfires forcing evacuations and the health effects of smoke. We mourn the destruction of Your beautiful creation. Keep all disaster responders safe as they risk their lives to save others. We grieve for those who have lost their lives, homes and memories.

Bless all joint initiatives in worship, fellowship and service to the community. May the world know that there is a grace at work in us which is not our doing but a gift from a Lover who outstrips all others. Through Christ Jesus our humble Lord. Amen!

In the name of the patient, insightful, and healing Christ we offer these prayers as we pray as one family, with the words Jesus taught us, saying...

Our Father ...