**Sermon for the Third Sunday of Easter-C**

**Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Aiken, South Carolina**

05-04-25

Revelation 5:1–14

In William Shakespear’s Romeo and Juliet, lovestruck Romeo declares, at one point, that Juliet is the sun. We understand that this is a metaphor. Juliet is not a large fiery orb with a solar system revolving around her.

 Romeo is painting a picture of how he feels in Juliet’s presence. To him, she is the very source of warmth and brightness, and all the joy of a beautiful day.

We use metaphors all the time. For example, if your vehicle broke down in the middle of nowhere, and someone came along and helped you to get back on your way, you might call them an angel.

 You’re not saying that they are a spirit-being sent from heaven. Once again, it’s a metaphor. A picture is worth a thousand words, and so, we use metaphors to express volumes of meaning in very few words.

The apostle John, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has written Revelation using metaphors; poetic picture language, using powerful imagery, heavy with symbolism in every detail, to proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord, and our salvation is through him alone.

What a joyful vision of heaven St. John has provided to us as we get a glimpse of Jesus receiving the kingdom from his father, to rule at his right hand.

This happened at Jesus’ ascension back into heaven, where he now sits enthroned, interceding for us, and ordering all things in the creation for the well being of his bride, the church, and for all who are members of the body of Christ.

John’s vision definitively shows that, even in heaven, the incarnate Christ remains fully human; Jesus bodily ascended back to heaven. The gospel accounts of Mark and Luke describe Jesus’ departure from the disciples’ sight at his ascension.

 John’s Revelation shows us the other side of the Ascension; Jesus’ arrival back in heaven. St. John writes; *I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.*

John’s vision is of the glorified Jesus, bearing the marks of the crucifixion in his resurrected body; the very same body, and the very same marks, that he presented to his disciples that first Easter, as they huddled behind locked doors.

 The seven horns symbolize that Jesus Christ is all- powerful, and the seven eyes that he is all-knowing. Why seven? In the Scriptures, seven often symbolizes perfection; completeness; seven is the number associated with God. Seven horns and seven eyes means that Jesus Christ, the Lamb, is God.

The Scroll that he receives from the hand of God the Father is sealed with seven seals; in other words the document is complete in itself. There is nothing that can be added to it.

It is the eternal plan, the eternal covenant of God; and nobody in heaven or earth is worthy to unseal it and reveal the heavenly decree; nobody, that is, but the Lamb of God, once slain, but now alive.

All power and authority has been given to him because he has defeated Satan, the great enemy of both God and mankind, with no less than his holy, sin cleansing blood.

 Only Jesus Christ, who was crucified, who died and was buried, who rose again from the dead, and is ascended to heaven, is worthy to take the scroll and open it; for this scroll is the proclamation of God’s eternal plan of salvation through Jesus Christ.

It is Jesus Christ alone who opens to us the Scriptures. Apart from the crucified and resurrected Christ, God’s word remains a sealed document, closed to our understanding.

 God’s word testifies of Jesus, for the words are God’s eternal decree, and God’s decree is this; that everyone who repents of sin, and in faith, clings to the Messiah alone for their salvation, is saved from eternal damnation, and has eternal life.

Nobody in all heaven or earth could redeem mankind, for our fallen nature separates us from God. If not for the Son of God sacrificing himself for us, His covenant of forgiveness through his grace alone would remain sealed and out of reach.

No mere man, and not even an angel from heaven, could open to us this covenant. But Christ has come, and has completed his saving work for us, and with his return to his eternal throne, heaven resounds with a new song;

 *“Worthy are you to take the scroll
 and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
 from every tribe and language and people and nation,
10and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
 and they shall reign on the earth.”*

Angels pick up the chorus;

 *“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”*

Ultimately, the entire creation joins in giving glory to God;

*“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”*

The joyful new song that began in heaven with Christ’s victory goes on for all eternity, and we here upon the earth, ransomed from every tribe and language and people and nation, united together as a royal priesthood in the one eternal kingdom, join with angels, and archangels, and the entire host of heaven, in this eternal song. This is the feast of victory for our God. Alleluia!

Until Christ’s return, it remains for the church on earth to continue to sing this victory tune in our lives, in our words, and in our songs, that others may know, and that we may be reminded and encouraged, to keep by faith what remains hidden to our eyes; the fact that Christ has triumphed, and our destiny is eternal life with him in a new, sinless creation; life as God always intended for us, long before he spoke anything into existence.

The Lord’s will is that all would be saved; Jesus died for everyone, and with him, we pray that many more would join us in the great eternal song of heaven. For the Lamb who was slain has begun His reign. Amen.