

Fourth Sunday of Easter – Good Shepherd

April 17, 2016

Revelation 7:9-17

The Lamb will be their Shepherd

Rev. George Ferch

Dear Friends in Christ,

When we worshipped in the smaller, plainer sanctuary, we did not have small and plain worship. I, the Worship Committee, and our musicians all took care to bring the best to our giving glory and praise to our God. Nothing has changed in our new larger sanctuary with far better acoustics. We continue to give glory and praise to God with gusto. Just like those gathered around God's throne in heaven.

We remain in the Revelation Jesus gave to John of God's throne and those present there. Last week we saw the angels, the four living creatures, and the elders. They remain. A new group is in the picture. These are they who have come out, and still are coming out, of the great tribulation. They are wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands looking to the living and reigning Christ.

Jesus Christ is both the Good Shepherd and the Lamb who was slain but lives again. This is a uniqueness of our Lord and Savior. He is the object of these worshipers' attention. In humility they bow before him just as we do in our worship. We will see what the elder meant when he said, **The Lamb will be their Shepherd.** Salvation is from our God. God spreads his tent over us.

From eternity, God planned his salvation of lost sinners. He then sent the gift of his Son, the perfect Passover Lamb as the sacrifice to pay for the world's sins. The Holy Spirit now gives his salvation to unbelievers through the means of grace that create the gift of faith by the miracle of regeneration. God is the source of salvation from start to finish. That is why the believers in heaven and who are going to heaven cried out in a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb."

The apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "For he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." [1:4] The one the Church Triumphant worships is both the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep, and the sacrificial Lamb who took his purity under the law to the altar of the cross.

John's vision of all the redeemed throughout time is a vision of a melting pot if ever there was one. Go ahead, paint your face onto one of those robed in white in the "great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb." God had promised Abraham that his descendants would be as the sands on the seashore and the stars in the sky. All believers are Abraham's descendants. Although the majority of people reject Christ, the number the Holy Spirit gathers and preserves to eternal life in heaven through the Word of Christ is great. We will come from the four corners of the earth. John saw us in four groups; four is the number for man.

The vision of the Church living in the Lamb's triumph is the vision of your certain future. It is your certain deliverance from the "great tribulation." The tribulation is not a specific short time of trouble. This tribulation is the entire history of the world. This tribulation is the daily struggle we experience at the hands of sinners, and a world God has subjected to frustration while it awaits final deliverance with the saints. Jesus described that tribulation a bit in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil about you." [Mt. 5:11]

Our triumph radiates out in our white robes. They are white because all of the filth and stench of our sins and their guilt the Lamb has washed away in the tide of his holy blood. God dressed us in those robes at the baptismal font. They are the garments of our salvation, Jesus blood and righteousness in which we will stand secure as God destroys this world with fiery judgment at the end. We hold in our hands the victory palm branches and wave them before God's throne in the Lamb's presence to honor him.

We will be busy in heaven in our white robes doing more than bowing our faces before God in worship. God spreads his tent over us. That means not only that he protects us but that we are active in temple service to God and to Christ, the Lamb.

We hear the angels repeat their song with its seven-fold praise. One of the elders identified the saints. Then, the elder describes the work we will do. “And serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them.” The Good Shepherd would spread his tent over the flock, meaning he would take perfect care of them. They would not hunger or thirst or be in danger. Jesus Christ will in heaven be with us in perfect and glorious deliverance. We will no longer suffer the results of sin. There will be no want or pain or sadness. The elements of sun and heat literally, and figuratively for suffering, will not affect us. The Good Shepherd will lead us to “springs of living water” and will wipe every tear from our eyes.

The Lamb will be their Shepherd, our Shepherd. As he does, we will serve him “day and night in his temple.” Day and night means constantly. His temple is heaven. Earthly priests served God in his earthly temple. This priestly service was a picture of our serving God as his priests in heaven. The word serve is the one Paul used in Romans 12 to describe our spiritual worship as “offering our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.” [12:1] Serving God in our public worship and in our Christian lives are a foretaste of the perfect and glorious worship/service we will render to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit in heaven.

To those who are wise in their own eyes, a lamb being the shepherd at the same time is foolishness. To us who are being saved, radiant in our white robes, on the way out of tribulation it all makes perfect sense. Standing before God’s throne under the celestial tent we would expect nothing else, and certainly, nothing less. Amen. <SDG>