

The Lamb Reigns! Forward in Faith!

Ascension Day – 05/18/23 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Revelation 5:1-14 Pastor Keith Besel

vv. 6-7, [John describes the moment Jesus takes His rightful throne in heaven,] **“And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain... And He went and took the scroll from the right hand of Him who was seated on the throne.”**

Introduction

✘ Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

✘ It's been 40 days since that great and glorious event took place – Jesus' physical, flesh-and-blood resurrection from the tomb. Now, as we heard in our Gospel Reading, that same flesh-and-blood Son of God has said His temporary farewells to His followers here on earth and He is physically ascending to His well-deserved glory in heaven.

➔ Moments before His arrival the host of angels and spiritual souls in heaven are singing the same song of praise that was sung on the sixth day when God looked at all He had created and said, It “was very good” (Gen. 1:31), “Worthy are You, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they existed and were created” (Rev 4:11).

✘ But it was soon after, that the song of creation grew silent. No praise was rendered when creation rebelled; no glory was given when Adam and Eve, the crown of creation, became estranged. No, it was then that fear and anxiety took their place. Only the cries of sin and death could be heard.

➔ Yes, it was then that the voice of God told the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman” (Gen 3:15). But that curse came with a promise as well, “He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” It was the song of deliverance; the promise of the Savior to come to rescue and save. And centuries later the promise was fulfilled with one loud cry from the tree: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Mt. 27:46).

✘ Because of that, the song is now renewed. Yes, now the Spirit of God has brought us to faith. Through water and the Word, He has grafted us into His Church and placed us into this community of believers gathered here on this glorious Day of Ascension, the day on which we celebrate the coronation of our Savior and King. Yes, today we join with all creation in heaven and on earth in singing, “To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” (v. 13).

I. Enter the throne room for the Lamb's coronation.

✘ We are blessed dear friends; we are blessed beyond our ability to fully comprehend it all; for the Apostle John, in the revelation he received from God; the one we're looking at this evening takes hold of our hearts and minds and brings us with him into the heavens; into the very throne room of the one and only eternal God.

➔ There on the throne He sits in all of His glory. According to chapter four, just before our text, surrounding God, seated on their own thrones, are the 24 elders, representing God's people from every age. And forming an inner circle around the throne are the four living creatures, the cherubim. Are they the angel messengers of God's Good News, or do they represent God's creation? We don't know for sure, but of course God knows. He hears their responsive liturgy of praise: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty” (4:8), and the elders respond, “Glory and honor and power” (4:11).

✘ Looking a little closer we see the scroll. It's there in God's right hand. There's writing on both sides; seven seals hold it shut. This is the entirety of human history; everything that has taken place and ever will is recorded on that scroll. Yes, your history is written there. Everything you've done and will do; every sin you've thought; every hurtful word you've said; every corrupt and evil deed you've committed. It's all there in the scroll; all there in the Creator's right hand.

➔ And now the ceremony begins. "A strong angel" asks loud and clear, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" (5:2) Who will assume responsibility for it? Who will bear its weight? John is brought to tears for no one is found. No one in all of heaven is able to bear the burden of humanity's history; no one to endure humanity's grief and sorrow; her hurts and pains; her sin and eternal judgment. No one means no hope, no future, no forgiveness, no deliverance, no life. Only death!

✘ But then one of the elders comforts John. There is one, he says. "Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" (5:5). He is worthy. And as John turns he sees Him and says in verse six, "I saw a Lamb standing" (5:6). "Worthy is the Lamb" (5:12).

➔ But that begs the question, "How do you measure worth?" In our world worth is measured in so many different ways. Some measure worth in terms of dollars. They look at Bill Gates and calculate his worth – billions of dollars. Others measure it in terms of athletic skill. To this day Wayne Gretzky is worthy of honor and praise, a city plaque, and a street named after him. Others measure it in terms of beauty or appearance or position or power.

➔ By those standards, our Lord Jesus is worth close to nothing. He had no bank account; He won no athletic contests; He wasn't known for His beauty and appearance. Yet we shout, "Worthy is the Lamb."

✘ But the elder changes the image and says, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah" (5:5). Yes, a lion seems so much more worthy. We call him the king of beasts. Lions epitomize power and strength; they generate fear in their enemies. But that's not what John sees when he looks up. No, he sees a lamb, looking as if it had been slain. So where's the worth in that?

➔ The elders explain it for us in verse nine, "for You were slain, and by Your blood You ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (5:9).

II. The Lamb is Jesus – died, risen, and ascended.

✘ This is a common picture in the Old Testament. The lamb of the Passover is slain so that its blood can be smeared on the doorposts. And through it God delivers His people from the angel of death as well as slavery to Pharaoh. The picture of the slain lamb is central to the great prophecies of the Suffering Servant as well. "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth" (Is. 53:7). Yes, the Suffering Servant, the Messiah, is like a lamb.

✘ Then John the Baptizer ties it all together for us. He points directly to Jesus and cries out, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn. 1:29). Aha! This is the one pierced for our transgressions; the one crushed for our iniquities; the one who is our substitute! Yes, the Lord God laid upon Him our sin and our iniquity; indeed, it was the sins of all of human history. He paid the price. He died for you; to save you; to redeem you; to forgive you. In His death; by His blood He purchased men and women and children for God "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (5:9), and my dear friends, you – that's plural: all y'all are one of them. He made you – us a kingdom, priests to declare His praises. So now you, too, join in the song, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain" (5:12).

→ Yes, this One who suffered and died was raised to life on the third day. He was seen in the flesh by Peter and James and John; by the other disciples; and by many others. To Him, death has now lost its sting. Then at God's appointed hour, He ascended to take His rightful place at the right hand of the Father. All powers and principalities have now been placed under His feet; He now reigns!

- ✘ That's what you and I can say to each other on this Ascension Day and every day as we encourage each other in our walk. Indeed, because He reigns, we are gifted; we are enabled; we are privileged to confidently go forward together in faith!

III. If the Lamb did not reign, we would be devoured.

- ✘ But of course we are not sufficient to go forward in our walk alone. The burdens are too heavy; the enemies are too strong. And boy do we face enemies, the same as God's people faced in those so-called giants that occupied the land on their journey to the Promised Land.

→ Yes, we have our own modern-day giants to face, the "isms" of our culture: individualism, rationalism, relativism, and secularism. We live in an increasingly immoral and violent society. We are in the middle of significant spiritual warfare, dear Christians. You know who and what those giants are. You encounter them every day on the Internet, on television, at school and work and in your own neighborhood – anywhere that you interact with people. So let's label these giants correctly; they are the spiritual forces of hell itself!

→ No, we are not sufficient of ourselves. Jesus warned us of this in John 16:33, "In the world you will have tribulation", He said. And now John, in his Revelation details the trouble, chapter after chapter, as each one of the seals is opened; apocalyptic visions; snippets of the future uncovered. Those pictures portrayed are enough to make us want to wimp out; to retreat and hide for fear of being devoured by them all.

- ✘ And devoured we would be, if not for this glorious truth: the Lamb reigns! He is the object of our faith. He has taken the scroll. He controls and directs the future. He exercises all power and authority. Oh it is such a comfort to know that this world is not under the guidance of some mindless evolutionary force; we are not subject to the ambitions and actions of human power, no matter who they are. No, we are under the will and power of God; exercised by the One who has ascended and now sits at the right hand of the Father – the Lamb, Jesus the Christ. The entire destiny of all humanity, indeed all of history, is under His supreme, victorious lordship and control.

IV. We go forward, singing our praise to the Lamb.

- ✘ So what! What does this all mean for you and me right now and in the future? You and I, as a part of the Lamb's reign on the throne now go forward. We go forward without fear, in the full and confident faith of Jesus Christ!

→ You see, Ascension Day is not so much about Jesus leaving us here on earth, as most people seem to think, but instead about Jesus taking up His reign in heaven for our future eternity in His glorious presence. He rules the world for the benefit of His people, the Church (Eph. 1:22). He is their Shepherd. He leads them by springs of living water. He dwells with His sheep and builds and strengthens their faith. He makes us bold even in the middle of trials and tribulations. He is the one who enables us and the whole Christian Church to remain faithful to the end; to live in His victory right now today and every day until we arrive before the throne ourselves.

- ✘ Dr. Louis Brighton, in his commentary on Revelation, points out an interesting detail in this vision; a detail that is often missed. Normally in the Book of Revelation angels appear to assist

John; pointing out details of the vision or interpreting a particular scene. But here in this vision, it's not an angel, but an elder in verse five. This elder points John to the Lamb! Who better to give that direction than an elder, one who has been touched personally by the Lamb himself; touched by His gift of forgiveness; redeemed from slavery to sin; and rescued from the clutches of hell? Who better than an elder? (Louis A. Brighton, Revelation, Concordia Commentary [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999], 135.)

→ Come to think of it, who better than you; than me; than all of us together in this congregation; than the whole Christian Church on earth (Eph. 3:10)? After all, we have been touched by His grace and forgiveness too. Even now, in this very hour, we are strengthened by the Spirit of God, in our baptismal grace, to go forward in faith. The Lamb does it for us as He pours out His body and blood in the Holy Supper to cover and forgive our sins. These gifts of Word and Sacrament are no trivial thing, my dear people of God. They strengthen and preserve us to life everlasting.

→ They sustain us and guide us forward every minute of every day until that day when we stand in our own resurrected flesh in awe before the throne and we see our ascended Lord, the Lamb, in all of His glory.

⌘ It's then that we will join in on the ascension song of praise; just as we rehearse it here in anticipation, "Worthy is the Lamb!" Oh that great and glorious eternity when we join with all the saints and angels; with the entire heavenly host and we sing in perfect unison, "To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" (5:13).

→ Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.*