

The Third Sunday of Easter

April 14, 2013

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Revelation 5:11-14

“Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: ‘Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!’ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!’ The four living creatures said, ‘Amen,’ and the elders fell down and worshiped. (NIV)

Have you ever found yourself asking the question: “*What’s next?*” Who hasn’t asked or wondered this? Maybe it was when you left the hospital and first walked into your home carrying your firstborn child and you and your spouse look at each other and wonder “*what’s next.*” This year we have several children who will soon be graduating and moving onto high school or college and perhaps the thought of “*what’s next?*” has started to cross some of your minds. When the day comes or perhaps has come when it is time to retire from your job it is a question that naturally arises: “*what’s next?*”

It would seem like the disciples were wondering the same thing as they waited in Galilee and decided to spend the night fishing. Christ had risen indeed. They now knew for sure the truth that their Jesus lives. But “*what’s next?*” This is exactly what the apostle John was wondering when the Lord Jesus appeared to him with this awesome Revelation. Even though we do not get to see this vision with our own eyes, I pray we learn the same thing that John learned in this most remarkable way. **The risen and glorified Christ shows us what is next!**

The apostle John had spent his life serving Jesus and now because of his faith has been exiled to an island called Patmos. He is the last one left. Peter, James and all the other apostles are gone and most did not get even close to having a long life like John here on earth. The Bible tells us James was quickly beheaded. According to tradition Peter was crucified on an upside down cross and others were sawed in half, skinned alive, or martyred in some other way. The believers to which the apostles brought the gospel were also being persecuted; very severe persecution was taking place throughout Asia Minor. Wouldn’t you have questions too? Don’t you think if you were now exiled as John was on this island that you too would be wondering about what is next?

This explains some of the emotion in the context of this vision. We read in the preceding verses about a scroll with writing on both sides. The scroll revealed the future. But in this vision no one was found worthy to open it – not the angels – not the saints in heaven. Since no one could open the scroll John starts to cry. We read that he actually “*wept and wept because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or look inside.*” John wanted to know what the future held. He wanted to see what was next.

Have you ever been there my fellow believers? When you hear the word “cancer,” when you hear the words “*we have to let you go*” isn’t it natural to ask “*what’s next?*” For those who have buried a spouse or close family member or friend perhaps you

too have wept and wondered “*what’s next.*” I just found out yesterday that my brother, who was so excited last month as he shared the news they were expecting their first child, had this child taken from them. As I talked with him I could hear in his voice a little of “*what’s next.*” Yes, there are times we, like the apostle John, want to know the future. We weep when things are out of our control. We want to know “*what’s next!*”

Thankfully we get an answer - a beautiful, comforting, amazing answer! Again in the verses preceding our text we see John gets his answer. One of the elders (we will talk more about the elders in a little while) tells John to stop crying. He tells John not to weep because there is One who is able to open the scroll. He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He is the Root of David. He is the One who triumphed! In other words, your Savior who shed His blood and died on the cross to wash all your sins away holds your future in His hands. Your risen and glorified Jesus who defeated even death for you will be guiding and directing what comes next for you. And that is when John looked and saw the Lamb, looking as it had been slain standing in the center of the throne.

Now we jump to the words of our text. What John is able to see is beyond what words can describe. Perhaps the word *brehtaking* would be most fitting. “***Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.***

In this vision John hears thousands upon thousands, ten thousand times ten thousand, of angels. He also hears the living creatures, which fit a similar description of the cherubim from the book of Ezekiel. He also hears the elders. Revelation often mentions 24 elders around God’s throne which refer to the 12 patriarchs for the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles. So these elders represent all believers from the Old and New Testament. With one loud voice all believers and angels gather around the throne of Jesus to sing: “***Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!***”

But there is more to the sweetest song ever sung. John also hears now every living creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea and all that is in them. Yes, creation itself will be freed from its frustration, liberated from sin and it’s bondage to decay, and will join in singing: “***To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!***” Finally, John hears the four living creatures say “Amen.” This is most certainly. And the elders fall down and worship.

Here we have not only the inspiration for the familiar *Halleluiah Chorus* – the Scriptures that are the basis upon which George Frederick Handel wrote the “*Messiah*,” but here we see a vision what will one day be our reality! Here Jesus shows us the final answer to the question of “*what’s next.*” John was able to see with his own eyes and hear with his own ears the awesome scene that awaits all of God’s children. Because of the Lamb that was slain this is what is next for John, for you, and for me – victory and joy forever and ever in heaven! It will be a place so breathtaking that we will all gather

around the throne of Jesus and sing. Yes, we will all sing side by side with all the angels and every believer and all living creatures praises to our Savior.

Think about what this vision had to mean to John, who was the last apostle left, sitting in exile wondering what was next. The risen and glorified Jesus in love shows John what is next. This disciple whom Jesus loved would soon be home with his Savior. So what does this vision mean for us? What does it mean for us who still struggle in this world of sin? What does this sight mean for us heading off to our next challenge or stage of life? What does it mean for us when we suffer or say goodbye to loved ones?

It means our Jesus is still in control. It means that our doubts and fears are not worth the time. It means all those sins can still be laid at the foot of the cross of the Lamb who was slain. It means that Jesus will be with you and guide you through what is next for you. Just as Jesus appeared to the disciples in Galilee to strengthen and equip them for what was next for them, so through God's Word and Sacraments Jesus comes to strengthen and equip us for whatever is next.

Jesus strengthens us today by giving us a glimpse of what's next for us – heaven! It will be greater than one shining moment. It will be far more amazing than the sweetest song we have ever heard. It will be the supreme celebration! It will be the ultimate song of victory! Until that awesome day may we do our Savior's work, sing His praises, and worship Him the best we are able knowing that because of the risen and glorified Christ we don't have to worry about what's next! Amen.

