

Good Shepherd Sunday - The Fourth Sunday Of Easter

April 25, 2010

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Revelation 7:9-17

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes--who are they, and where did they come from?" I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (NIV)

Today, we have one of the most comforting pictures or themes in the Bible. We are sheep who are under the protecting care of a shepherd. We follow our shepherd through all, listening to His voice. That's because our shepherd is the Good Shepherd. He knows each one of His sheep by name and His sheep know Him. So we follow our Good Shepherd wherever He leads. This Shepherd who leads us is also the Lamb - the perfect Lamb who came to take the place of every wayward sheep - the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world - the Lamb who was slain for you and for me. This is the Good Shepherd who loves and leads His sheep for whom He laid down His own life. So again, we trust our Good Shepherd and willingly follow wherever He leads us.

These truths of Good Shepherd Sunday are so comforting and so beautiful we are moved to respond with worship. As the Psalmist writes in Psalm 100: ***"Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name."*** This morning, as we consider how we are His sheep, let us **Worship the Lamb who is Our Shepherd.** Worship Him with our best here on earth, and look forward to worshipping Him perfectly in heaven.

You might say to me: *"Pastor, of course we worship."* After all, that's one of the main reasons Amazing Grace exists and we have church services. We worship our God and our Good Shepherd for providing all that we need for body and soul - for guiding us through life. But what is worship like here on earth? It is often lacking, isn't it? We don't have people beating down the doors to get in on Sundays. Our worship is often

with a few (around 60) souls gathered like this morning. Many people just don't see the need for worship. They don't want to worship God or listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd. Other people fit worship in once in a while but don't consider worship as a high priority every week. Maybe if nothing else important is going on then they will consider it. Some are forced to worship. Others pretend to worship or come to church for the wrong reasons or think they earn something by their worship. There are even worshippers who honor God with their lips but their hearts are far from Him.

We know this kind of worship and these kind of sins are not just with people out there in this world. Our worship is often lacking. Our hearts are not always thinking about what is on our lips. Our lips are not always singing joyfully and shouting out the praise of our God. Too often the problems and hardships of this life distract us from giving our best in worship. Our trust wavers too easily as we wonder where our Good Shepherd is leading us. We say and sing that all praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to the Lamb. But, at times, we would like to keep just a little of the honor and glory for ourselves. We foolishly look to our own wisdom and in certain situations want to depend on our own power & strength. Many times our praise and thanks is lukewarm or mediocre at best. Our worship doesn't always reflect the greatness of our God or the awesome love of the Lamb who is our Shepherd.

For such sins I pray we repent. I pray we turn again to the Lamb who was slain for the forgiveness He so graciously purchased for us. May we follow our Good Shepherd as He guides us to the green pastures and quiet waters of His Word and Sacraments which feed and nourish our burdened souls. May we listen to the voice of our Good Shepherd to learn how to give Him our very best in worship. May we follow our Good Shepherd wherever He leads.

One day the Good Shepherd will lead us to a place where we'll experience worship at its' very best. The apostle John had been given a glimpse of the church on earth and the struggles and persecution that work to hinder the worship of God's people on earth. But now the Lord gives John this wonderful revelation of the Church triumphant perfectly worshipping one day in heaven. Listen to what John sees: ***"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb. All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"***

Ever been to a sold out arena for the biggest game of the year? Think of the excitement and energy in the place. But even that energy and excitement comes up far short of this scene. I think of how much I love to worship on Easter morning when the church is full and people are dressed up and we loudly sing out cheerful songs. But not even that worship compares to this perfect worship in heaven. What a sight! Here are not just a few, but a multitude no one can count. They come from every people and corner on earth. They are dressed in their best white robes and holding palm branches - used to celebrate victory. They are gathered with all the angels and living creatures. They stand together before the throne of the Lamb. They fall on their faces in worship

and give credit where credit is due. Salvation belongs to God and to the Lamb. He gets 100% credit for saving us. They say "Amen" and ascribe to God all that is His and belongs to Him alone - ***praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength...forever and ever!***"

What an awesome sight! What a day this will be! There are no hypocrites in this place. There is not a person that doesn't want to be there or who is there for the wrong reasons. There are no half-hearted worshippers. There is not a single mouth just sitting there quietly. This great multitude, that no one can count, with their hearts and voices and their all, worship. What a day to look forward to!

Now we might ask the same question an elder, which most likely refers to a believer or minister of the Word, asks John: ***"These in white robes--who are they, and where did they come from?"*** Who is going to be there for this biggest celebration? Where did this great multitude come from and how did they all get there? Why are so many now eagerly gathered around the throne in perfect worship? Our answer could be the same as that of the apostle John, ***"Sir, you know."*** ***"And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."***

There is only one reason, and one reason alone that this great multitude of people from every nation on earth has been taken out of this world of sin and into the glory of heaven. There is only one reason you and I will be there for this celebration unlike any other. Our sins have been washed away in blood - for the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from every sin. (1 John 1) As Isaiah writes: ***"Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."*** (1) Every believer in heaven will wear Jesus' perfect life - the robe of righteousness Jesus' covered us with at our baptisms. We will reign in heaven as holy ones because our sins were all taken away when Jesus suffered and died for them on the cross. Christ's empty tomb made certain our victory over sin & Satan, over death and the devil. For the Lamb who was slain has begun His reign!

"Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." Do you see why we will join together in perfect worship? We will truly enjoy the feast of victory and eternal pleasures in heaven.

This, dear friends, is why we follow our Good Shepherd wherever He leads. He is leading us into eternal life. Listen to His voice for Jesus will guide us through the dark valleys of life until we are finally safe in the eternal fold. There we will never again face hardship or pain or suffering. There sin and Satan can never touch us again. There all our tears will be wiped away forever. There at the center of the throne will be the Lamb - the Lamb who is our Shepherd. Worship Him with your best here on earth as we look forward to the day we and all believers will worship Him perfectly in heaven. Amen.