

Psalm 30
Revelation 5:11-14

Third Sunday of Easter
Midway Presbyterian Church
May 1, 2022

Worthy Is the Lamb

Introduction to the Psalm

Our Psalm for this Third Sunday of Easter expresses thanksgiving for personal deliverance, with a call for the worshipping body to join in with hymns of praise. Listen to these words from Psalm 30...

Introduction to the Epistle Lesson

Our Epistle Lesson today is from Revelation. It was written by the leader of the churches in Asia Minor, exiled on the Isle of Patmos, a Roman political prison in the Aegean Sea. St. John observes a scroll that will not only shed light on the final events of history, but will also set them in motion. But who is worthy to open the scroll that is sealed with seven seals? Listen to these words from Revelation 5:11-14...

Sermon

Fritz Kreisler was a master violinist born in Vienna in 1875. Prior to World War II, he gained great acclaim as a person who could play as no one ever had before. There is a story told in several versions of how Kreisler acquired his Stradivarius violin. The story of how he was once invited to the home of a wealthy Englishman who owned the instrument. After dinner, Mr. Kreisler asked if he could see the violin and hold it. So it was brought from the safety of its location and placed in his hands. Then Kreisler asked his host if he could play the instrument. After being granted permission, he played so beautifully that the owner of the violin was moved to tears. He then presented the Stradivarius to Kreisler saying that because of his virtuosity, he

was more worthy of its ownership than he. Well, here in Revelation 5 Christ, The Lamb of God, was revealed to be worthy to open the scrolls.

The Book of Revelation has been called “The Fifth Gospel.” It was written to give comfort, encouragement, and hope to early Christian communities that could not freely practice their faith in the Roman Empire during the latter part of the First Century, promising victory over evil in the name of Jesus Christ. Rome called for allegiance to and worship of the Emperor. Christianity claimed allegiance and worship to the one God and his Messiah, Jesus Christ. He is the true “King of kings and Lord of lords.”

In our lesson today we find the culmination of a throne room vision that begins in chapter 4. There John beholds the splendor of the divine throne, its glorious surrounding court, and the multitude that offers ceaseless praise to God. He then sees the scroll which is held by “the one seated on the throne.” (5:1)

But one thing is lacking—an agent worthy to open the scroll. Then the Lamb receives the scroll from the hand of God, and the heavenly choir breaks forth in song, praising the Lord and acknowledging that the Lamb is worthy.

And what a chorus of praise it was! First, by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. “Worthy is the Lamb to receive and to open the scroll.” Second, the praise of tens of thousands of angels singing:

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!” (v. 12)

In Greek seven was the perfect number and thus it is that the Lamb received seven gifts, gifts which any ruler might desire. Gifts that Christ would use to carry out the rule of God. And because the Lamb has faithfully carried out the purposes of God, he is worthy to receive the

praise of all creation. And so the worship scene swells. Every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and in the sea—they all sing:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power,
for ever and ever!” (v. 13b)

It was the music of this hymn that inspired Handel to write the marvelous “Messiah.” You’ll remember Beth’s playing from it the “Hallelujah Chorus” at the opening of our Easter Service.

St. Francis of Assisi, shortly before his death, wrote the moving hymn that we sang as our first hymn today:

All creatures of our God and King,
lift up your voice and with us sing:
Alleluia, alleluia!
Thou burning sun with golden beam,
thou silver moon with softer gleam,

*O praise him, O praise him,
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!*

No doubt such a scene as John describes presented a great contrast to what his readers saw from day to day. According to the historian Josephus, Vespian was acclaimed benefactor and savior, the only deserving emperor of Rome, because of his military prowess. But the victory that made the Lamb deserving was suffering death upon a cross. This was the vision seen by St. John the Evangelist.

In his commentary on Revelation, Craig Koester says that the way all creation ascribes honor and power to the Lamb underscores legitimacy to his reign. The people to whom the Revelation is written saw emperors cultivate the impression that they ruled, because people everywhere wanted them to do so. John knows that in reality, they imposed their will on their

subjects, just as they do today in Russia, China, and North Korea. Thus it's clear in Revelation who truly has this rightful claim of power.

It's just amazing that God's wisdom and power came to light in Jesus of Nazareth, born of a Jewish peasant girl named Mary in a manger in the little town of Bethlehem, because there was no room in the inn. And yet, through him all kinds of people would become new creations. He is worthy. Who is the Lord of the world and worthy of worship? Is it the Roman emperor and all he stands for? Or is it the crucified one? In the Revelation of St. John the answer is abundantly clear.

This passage from Revelation reminds us of the power of the Cross. That God is able to work through suffering and seeming defeat. Through whatever trial we face, whatever need, whatever sickness, whatever loss. The Lamb of God is the same One who said "Come unto me all who are weak and heavy laden, and you will find rest." In all our brokenness, we are never too damaged for God to care for us.

Through the proclamation of wondrous symbols in Revelation, there shines forth the radiant truth of the power of the crucified and risen Christ. Through the Lamb we know a love stronger than hatred. A forgiveness stronger than sin. A hope stronger than despair. A life stronger than death.

One of the hymns that we associate with Easter is, "I Know that My Redeemer Liveth." Well, the Lamb of Revelation is our Redeemer. Christ was willing to give up his own life for the sins of mankind. To have his body broken, and his blood shed. And through his death and resurrection, he redeems us. And that redemption is not just for you and me, but for all people that on earth do dwell. No racial, national, or social barriers—all are extended God's gracious

invitation. The least, the last, and the lonely are all embraced by God's love made known in Christ.

And because of Christ's redeeming work, there is created a royal priesthood of believers that includes you and me. People whose response to the redemptive mission of the Lamb of God is to join with others, and champion God's love in our personal lives, in the community, and throughout the world.

The final verse of our lesson from Revelation 5 reads: "The four living creatures said, 'Amen!', and the elders fell down and worshipped." Amen means "yes," or "so be it." It is the worshipping affirmation to the Word of God and of his Christ.

Amen declares that we believe this to be true. We believe that Jesus Christ is worthy of all devotion and praise. That before him, every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth. We believe that God will bring about his good and perfect will. That God, and not evil, will have the last word. He will turn our mourning into dancing. Dry every tear, heal every hurt, turn death into life. Remove our sackcloth and clothe us with joy. We believe that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. For now. And forever and forever. And the congregation said: "Amen!"

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!