10th Pentecost- Narrative-Revelation Revelation 5

August 14, 2022 Trinity, Stephens City

Illustration: Lowering the Lord Nelson Statue

At Trafalgar Square in the city of London stands a statue of Lord Nelson. Resting atop a tall pillar, it towers too high for passersby to distinguish his features. For this reason, about forty years ago a new statue – an exact replica of the original – was erected at eye level so everyone could see him. God also transcends our ability to see; the eyes of our understanding cannot discern divine features*. But we have set before us an exact representation, “the image of the invisible God.” To know God we must look only at Jesus.*

*Donald McCullough, The Trivialization of God, NavPress, p 63.*

We began our study of Revelation last week with Chapter 4 and John’s vision of the great throne room of God. He is faced with a magnificent sight of majesty and glory- the one on the throne shining like jasper and carnelian, John says. In other words, basically red, orange, yellow and, perhaps, green. There was a rainbow of emerald and there were four mighty creatures around the throne representing the four cardinal directions of the earth and all its creatures. Among those worshiping the one on the throne are 24 elders as representatives of all the great saints, the faithful ones of God in heaven and on earth. Lightning flashed from the throne and fire torches burned bright. Whew! What a vision!

If you remember, the book of Revelation was, first, a letter to the Seven major church communities in Asia Minor. It was written to Jewish Christ-followers who were in exile away from their home country, Israel. In these communities were, also Gentiles who had come to believe in Jesus. The lives of all these believers were endang aggression of the Roman emperor against those who would not bow to him as “our Lord and God.” It was written late in the 1st Century well after the temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Roman emperor Vespasian. The visions of Revelation are, first and foremost, means to give these communities hope for the future. As I said last week, this book, like all the biblical scriptures, was not written TO US, but they are written FOR us.

Another important thing to understand about this book of John’s visions is that it draws from a very long history of apocalyptic writings that would have been very familiar to the Jewish readers of the time. Many of the same themes and even descriptions can be found in the Old Testament books of Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Jeremiah and even Exodus. Do you know what Apocalyptic means? (pause for answers) Apocalyptic literature deals with signs or prophesy of events portending the end of the world. The symbolic numbers and features of the creatures are indicative of ancient apocalyptic writings. There is much in Revelation that derives from the Old Testament; however, there are also new ideas and different themes that the author uses to help the church communities endure the times.

Today’s reading is the second part of John’s vision of the heavenly throne room. In this portion, John sees the presentation of a divine scroll or book, and he meets another member of the heavenly court- we’ll get to this momentarily.

Who is worthy to open the scroll? At first there seems to be no one who is worthy to open the scroll. John weeps in distress and fear that there is no one who will intervene in the events to come. The people of the church would be helpless and hopeless. I love the drama here! Who is worthy?

One of the elders names the Lion of Judah as the worthy one. The one who has conquered. This is an Old Testament messianic image of the warrior king who will free the people from foreign oppression. The Jewish messiah promised was said to be of the tribe of Judah, strong and mighty as a lion, with genealogical roots in the line of the great King David. In the Gospels, we read of the militaristic hopes of those who follow Jesus, don’t we? Yet when John looks, he doesn’t report seeing the Lion; instead he sees the “Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered.” I expect you’ve figured out who this represents? (Jesus Christ).

Well, this is the one John sees standing before the throne and taking the scroll from the right hand of God. In the Gospel According to John, John the Baptist proclaims that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Those are different Johns, but they agree that the worthy one, the only one with power to usher in the end times is the Lamb who was slain yet lives so that people of God could know salvation freedom.

The symbolism of God’s powerful right hand giving the Lamb of God the scroll of revelation shows equality of power and authority with the Creator. Seven horns and seven eyes symbolize the Lamb’s absolute power and knowledge of everything on heaven and earth. Through this one, God will bring about the new creation, the new heaven and earth. He is worthy to open the seals of the scroll to reveal what happens before the new creation is complete.

The liturgy of heaven continues with heightened fervor and joy. The “new song” indicates that the heavenly powers, with the Lamb in control, will overcome the earthly powers and bring heaven and earth together under his rule. As Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza wrote in her Revelation commentary, “[T]he author of Revelation pictures Christ in political terms as the ‘King of kings.’” As the events of the end-time are enacted by the Lamb, the author does not focus on the prediction of these events but on, as Dr. Gerhard Kroedel writes, “what is relevant to faith is God and the Lamb forever!”

And this is where the message of the chapter is FOR US. The question, “who is worthy to be worshiped and praised”, resonates in our lives of faith as we deal with the challenges and sorrows of life on earth. Who is the one that, although divine, has experienced life, suffering and death just as we humans do? Jesus! Who is the one that shows us the path of love, forgiveness, service and hope to follow through the toils, trials, and perils of life? Jesus! Who is the one who, through his great act of sacrificial love, has destroyed the wages of sin that we deserve, has power over any evil we may face, and even out of death brings new life? Jesus! Who is the one who, though seemingly meek and mild as a lamb, holds all of life and creation in his hands? Jesus! When we keep our eyes and hearts focused on Jesus, we will be able to weather any storm. When we keep our faith in God’s work through Jesus, the Lamb: the promise of a new creation- a new world- a new heaven and earth- this promise will provide strength and motivation to make this vision known in our time. Whether the end of the world is coming or not, God made known to us through Jesus, the Lamb, is with us now and always. Who is worthy to be praised? Jesus! Amen