

Revelation 4:9-11

I was listening to Garrison Keeler on public radio a few weeks ago. He was doing a show from Seattle and in one of his monologues he said, in a joking way, there are more dogs than Christians in Seattle and the crowd cheered. In many places Christians are thought of as ignorant, resistant to progress or just a bother. In our community, too, many have a low opinion of Christ.

Really that should not surprise us. Jesus said it would be this way. He told His disciples, "All men will hate you because of me." As it hated Him it will also hate you and me.

Christians were suffering when John was inspired to write the Book of Revelation. They were feeling the anger of the Roman government. Some were exiled, some had their property confiscated and some were put to death. In a weak moment a Christian of the time might have asked. "Where is the kingdom promised by Christ? Where is His protection? Where is the peace and deliverance that He promised? Revelation was written to remind Christians who are suffering to be patient because the Lord Jesus triumphed and they will share in His triumph.

Our text is a view of heaven and in this vision we see Jesus as the triumphant Lamb of God. At the center of this scene is the Lamb that was slain. Lambs in the time of the Old Testament were sacrificial animals. God commanded that their blood to be offered to make atonement for the sins of the people. Sin against God called for punishment. The punishment for sin is death. Lambs were substituted for sinners and their blood made payment for sin. The sacrificial lamb pointed to Christ whose blood would make everlasting payment for sin. A lamb also was slain at Passover. The Jewish Passover was a holiday commemorating the time when God delivered His people from bondage in Egypt. The last plague that forced the Egyptians to let God's people go was the death of the firstborn. God warned that He would pass through the land of Egypt and that the eldest child in every house would die. However, houses with their doorway marked with the blood of a lamb would be spared. A lamb saved people from death. These sacrificial lambs were prophetic pictures of Christ.

John the Baptist called Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus would represent the entire human race and by His innocent suffering and death made atonement for the sins of the world. It was said that He was led as a lamb to the slaughter. Using the picture of a lamb, St. Peter wrote, "You know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from your empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

This Lamb of God carried the sins of the world and was ridiculed by His enemies; He was forsaken, laughed at and spit upon, falsely accused and condemned and finally crucified and put to death.

However, His suffering and sacrifice accomplished its purpose and when His work was over He was glorified. He arose from the dead and ascended into heaven and is now seated at the right hand of God the Father. The vision granted John is of Jesus and His triumph. John writes, "And I saw and heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders. Their number was ten thousand times ten thousands and thousands of thousands.

We are treated to a concert in honor of the Lamb. Millions upon millions of angels sing the praises of victorious Jesus for He defeated the devil and won the freedom of mankind. He did away with the guilt of sin that called for man's damnation and He overcame death by His resurrection from the dead so that all who believe in Him might arise to live with Him forever.

Present for this heavenly celebration for the triumphant Savior are the four living creatures. What these beings are I can't say for sure. Some have said that they are four leaders among the angels. The twenty four elders around the throne are said to represent the church, twelve from the Old and twelve from the New Testament. They would be the twelve patriarchs from the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles of the New Testament.

The angel choir loudly sings the praises of the Lamb. They sing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing."

Remember how Jesus humbled Himself so that He might carry the sins of the world. As far as His human nature was concerned He emptied Himself of all the power and glory that was His as true God but now that His victory was accomplished all power and honor are restored to Him. He receives power. After His resurrection He said to His disciples, "All power is given to Me in heaven and on earth. Now almighty, He guards His people and causes all things to work for their welfare. He receives riches. It is written of Christ, "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. Now triumphant He receives all the treasures of the universe and He uses them for the blessing of His people. He takes again the wisdom, the omniscience, that is His as God so that His rule is always just and wise. He is given honor and glory and blessing. He no longer must suffer disgrace and shame. We are told that Hebrews prayers began with the words, "Blessed art thou, O Lord, King of the universe. Now the honor of God is directed to the once despised Jesus.

Then John saw and heard every created thing which is in heaven and upon the earth and under the earth and upon the sea and everything in them praises the triumphant Lamb. All of creation praises Him and celebrates His victory. Creation sings, "To Him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever." The battle is over. Sin death, hell and the devil are defeated now and forever.

And the four living creatures say, "Amen." And the elders fell and worshipped. Amen means, "So shall it be." He will be praised forever and ever.

I wonder what the crowd that ridiculed Christians will think when they see the Lamb in His glory on the last day. What will be their reaction when they are judged by Christ and His Christians whom they regarded as fools?

During the time of His humiliation it seemed as if Jesus was a pathetic loser. After His victory He is revered and honored as Almighty God.

Those who follow Jesus also walk in His footsteps. They too often look like losers. The church is a little flock on earth. It seems it is always struggling for funds, it is constantly suffering the attacks of false teachers and of traitors in its midst. As one of our hymns puts it, "By schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed." The individual believer also appears to be a loser. I see the Christian dying of cancer, heart failure or stroke. Is she a loser? No way! Because of his commitment to Christ friends and even family

members might turn against him. He might not be able to get the job he wants. He might suffer the contempt of his community. He might be called homophobic, bigoted or anti-intellectual. When he insists on sound doctrine he might even be called unloving. A loser? No way! When we suffer for the Lord's sake let us remember the message of the Book of Revelation. The Lamb has triumphed and all those who put their trust in Him will one day share in his triumph. He said in this world you will have trouble. But take heart. I have overcome the world. Let me take you to another of the visions of St. John. This is found in Revelation 7:13-17. Believers in heaven are described with these words, "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 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." Christians, take heart. The Lamb has won and we will share in His triumph. Amen.