

“Easter Joy”

Revelations 7:9-17

Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!!

I love the portion of the book of Revelation that we heard in our Epistle lesson. The utter and complete joy of the multitude gathered around the Lamb – the risen Christ. They have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. They have departed the sinfulness, the difficulty, the tribulation of this life and have entered the eternal joy and glory of the presence of God in heaven. That is Easter joy in the fullest sense.

And, O, how we look forward to that. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst . . . And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. That is Easter joy.

And we look longingly into our future, knowing that there will come a time for each of us to depart the great tribulation. But we look to that day never forgetting that we are Easter people. We have been washed clean in the waters of Holy Baptism. We participate in the blood of the Lamb. We gather around the Lamb – the risen Christ presents Himself in body and blood, and we sing “Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and

ever. Amen!” What we have right here, this is Easter joy.

And it is here that we have a deep and abiding connection with those saints in heaven. Like them, we are privileged to be in the physical presence of Christ, as He comes to us under the form of bread and wine.

That multitude standing in white robes gathered around the Lamb, or the earlier description of those in white robes standing around the throne of heaven in Revelation chapter 4 – they aren’t described any differently than the saints on earth in the letters to the churches of Sardis and Laodicea from Revelation chapter 3.

The church triumphant, the church in heaven is not so far away from Christ’s church on earth. We gather right here with angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven. The main difference is that Christ’s Church on earth still struggles with sin, and Christ’s church on earth is full of sinners. The Old Adam is still hanging on. Ask any of our confirmands about the seriousness of our original sin and they will tell you “It is the total corruption of our human nature passed down from Adam through our parents.”

The total corruption – there is nothing good in us from the start. Then we hear Jesus words to the saints in the church in Sardis from Revelation 3, “I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.”

I know what you are thinking, if this is true of the Christians in

Sardis and Laodicea, how can I say that the saints in heaven are described in the same way as the saints in the churches of Sardis and Laodicea?

I can say this because the saints in heaven have come out of the great tribulation. They made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb, not in their own works. Jesus says, “I know **your** works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.” And by my works, I am dead. By your works, you are dead. We are made alive in Christ, in the blood of the Lamb. And through Baptism we have been made alive, and I am not the only one wearing a white robe. In the sight of God, you are wearing a robe much more righteous than this one.

This is not about living the “transformed life” as so many want to make the focus of life in the church – as if your righteousness is a measure of all that you do. This is about being transformed out of death and into life, and this is the work of Christ.

The saints on earth, like the saints in heaven, stand before God wrapped in robes of righteousness – but not our righteousness. The only righteousness we can attain is in the blood of the Lamb, just like the saints in heaven.

We hear the words, “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore.” It is said that the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will guide them to springs of living water.

Jesus tells His followers, “I am the living bread that came

down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” [Jn. 6:51]. During His ministry, Jesus spent most of His time preparing His disciples for life after the Ascension. He was always leaving the crowds behind and going to remote places. This is clearly not the modern church-growth model. His main concern was the teaching (the educating) of His disciples.

Jesus prepared His 12 disciples for the days when He would no longer stand before them in flesh and blood, yet, He would be able to come to all of His disciples in flesh and blood. This is Easter joy. In Christ, we do not hunger. We do not thirst. We are filled and we are satisfied.

And the Lamb at the center of the throne is our Good Shepherd who leads us beside the still waters, our cup overflows, and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Although we still walk through the valley of the shadow of death, God has wiped away every tear from our eyes. He has replaced our sorrow and the pain of death with the joy of Easter. Amen.

Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!!