

“Easter Joy”

Revelation 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.

This text is a favorite of mine. I especially like to use it for funeral texts. Generally, I try to use the appointed texts for that week of the church year when conducting a funeral. God’s Word is living and active. It teaches us how to live and it teaches us how to die. It teaches us how to rejoice and it teaches us how to mourn. The texts for the week keep us in the season.

But there are certain times when the appointed lessons for the week are not really appropriate for use at a funeral. When that happens, one of my favorite “go-to” texts is Revelation 7 – probably because I have long

desired to have “Behold a Host Arrayed in White” sung at my funeral. The good thing is that it can be sung in any season of the church year. Some of the other hymns I want have “Alleluias” in them, so I pray the Lord doesn’t call me out of this life during Lent.

A couple of weeks ago, I attended two funerals where I was not doing the preaching. One funeral was anticipated, the other was shockingly sudden. We are reminded that there will come a time for each of us when the Good Shepherd will bring us through the valley of the shadow of death and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

There will come a day for each of us to depart the great tribulation. We cannot choose the hour, the day, or even the season. The Lord is my Shepherd. But regardless of whether our exit from this life is anticipated due to an illness at the end of a long life, or due to a tragically abrupt end while still in the flower of youth, we look to that day never forgetting that we are Easter people.

Last week in Bible class, we talked about how, even if you live to be 100 years old, the portion of our life where we are living in this sinful, fallen world is the blink of an eye compared to eternity with our Lord.

What matters in this part of our life is that 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.

This is a small taste of what we will have in the resurrection. And it is here, gathered together with Christ and His Word, 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. Satan is still loose on earth for what is described in Revelation as the "little season."

The difference between the saints on earth and the saints in heaven is that 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. To the church in Sardis in Revelation 3, 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. 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 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. He knows our works. 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 says, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” Also He says, “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].

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!!