

"Worthy Weakness"

Revelation 5:8-14

April 10, 2016

3rd Sunday of Easter

One Sunday afternoon, a young boy around the age of 10 years old walked up to his parents and said, "I don't want to go to heaven." His parents were naturally shocked. The family loved the Lord Jesus Christ and were very religious. They attended church every Sunday. So, when their son said he didn't want to go to heaven, they were concerned. They asked him, "Why don't you want to go to heaven, son?" The boy answered, "Well, in Sunday School this morning, we asked our Sunday School teacher what we would do in heaven and she told us that we will worship Jesus forever. We worship in church every Sunday. If that's what heaven is, then I don't want to go!"

We may chuckle at this story, but this boy was being very honest and, in his child-like innocence, he was expressing a deeper truth. Many people feel the same way as he does: they don't want to worship and they may give more specific reasons: the service is boring, the hymns are old fashioned, the preacher is boring or long winded. They may say the services are too early or too late. The building is too cold or too hot. The people are too cold and unfriendly or too overbearing. Anyone can come into our worship service here on any given Sunday, yet many people choose not to come, including over half of the people who profess to be members of our church.

Our text today describes a worship setting that is very different: heaven. And what a wonderful sight it is. God allowed St. John, to have a vision of heaven. John saw God Himself seated on a throne in the center of heaven. Near the throne is the Lamb, Jesus Christ. Twenty-four elders, representing the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles - that is, all of God's people from the Old and New Testament, sit on twenty-four thrones surrounding God's throne and worship God. Four living creatures, probably cherubim, are around the throne worshipping God. Thousands upon thousands of angels surround them. And all are singing and praising God and the Lamb.

What a thrilling sight! Many people would enjoy seeing and experiencing THAT kind of worship, but cannot. I don't mean because heaven is far away and we are here on earth. People - all people - are unable to participate in the heavenly worship because they are not worthy to be involved. Our text today describes a situation that is holy and perfect. God's holy angels and saints (His holy people) offer worship and God and the Lamb - holy and perfect - accept that worship.

We who are here are not holy. We are sinners. We are sinners by nature, having been born that ways. We are sinners by deed, having lived that way. Sinful actions are only the manifestations or symptoms of that sinful nature. That sinful nature is clearly shown in our worship lives. The problem is not that some people worship and some people don't worship. All people, Christians and non-Christians, worship. The problem is some people worship the one true God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and some people worship something else.

In his explanation of the 1st Commandment in the Large Catechism, Martin Luther said that having a god does not necessarily refer to going to church and performing religious rituals. Rather, he said, "A god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need. To have a god is nothing more than to trust and believe in him with our whole heart...That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, really your God." (Tappert, p.365)

Where do you look for good? Where do you find refuge in time of need? What does your heart really cling to and entrust itself? If it is anyone or anything else other than the Triune God, then you have an idol. Luther said that money and possessions were the most common idols on earth. That really hasn't changed. But there are other idols that can prevent us from worshipping the true God: sleeping in, our friends, our families, our children's sports and other activities, college and professional sports, our jobs, our schools, our politicians, the pleasures of this life, camping, vacationing, and so on. When we are busy devoting our time, our resources, and our actions to our idols, we are not only miss out on worship here, but we will also miss out on the greatest worship of all in heaven.

So, what do we do? Are we doomed to miss this most wonderful worship and only read about it in the book of Revelation? No. While we are not worthy to attend the heavenly worship on our own merits, there is Someone who *is* worthy to attend the heavenly worship. In fact, He is the one who receives the heavenly worship - the Lamb, Jesus. Our text says, "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and praise!" It is He who is able to help us.

Why does the Bible call Jesus "the Lamb"? Remember what Jewish people used lambs for. They chose perfect lambs without spot or defect, killed these lambs, and offered them to God for the forgiveness of

their sins. John the Baptist referred to Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." He is holy and perfect and yet was slain. He offered His life as a sacrifice and substitute for our sinful lives to gain the forgiveness of all sins of all people. God accepted His life as a worthy sacrifice for us.

He who is worthy - Jesus - now makes you worthy as well. He helps you see your sin, confess it, and repent of it. The Lamb's death means that God takes away your sin. He declares you to be holy and pure. He gives you a new heart and a new attitude to love and obey Him. He lives in you and through you to be obedient to God. His actions make you worthy to stand before Him in the heavenly congregation to worship Him.

What a day that will be! But you don't have to wait far into the future to experience it. He gives you a little taste of that heavenly worship right now - here in this church. Our worship together is not a business meeting, a classroom with an academic lecture, or an event requiring attendance to make God happy. Worship is not you coming to do something for God or give something to Him. In our worship here, God comes to you here to give you His gifts and blessings and to allow you to experience a bit of heaven.

The Bible compares heaven with a feast -- the marriage supper of the Lamb. In the offertory in our previous blue hymnal, we sang, "Grace our table with your presence, and give us a foretaste of the feast to come". God has graced us with His presence right here. He is right here in our midst. He speaks His Word through His pastor, condemning our sin, forgiving our sins, and encouraging us.

The Lamb -- Jesus Christ -- is here. His body and blood are here on our altar in bread and wine for us to eat and drink and receive God's forgiveness and peace, as a foretaste of the wedding supper of the Lamb. Here, heaven touches earth. The scene that we read about in our text takes place here in our sanctuary. Remember how we say in the liturgy, "Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify your glorious name...."

The Holy Spirit is present and working through His Word and Sacrament to enable us to believe this and to experience it.

Many people might look at this and say, "So what?" Many people might still want to do something else on Sunday morning. Other things might seem more important. But what could be more important than a right relationship with God? Everything else in our life that we hold so near and dear - our sleep, our sports, our family, our fun, and so on - will eventually pass away.

We *will* have to face God someday. But we don't have to face Him then in judgment. We can face Him now in grace. God is here! He restores our relationship with Him through Son, Jesus Christ, which we hear about here! His gifts - love, forgiveness, strength, support, and encouragement - are here for us to receive!

A new attitude and perspective on life is received here. We don't want to miss these things, no matter what. We come to church because we want to, not because we are forced; to receive, not to give; and to experience, not to just sit. We want and need that more than all the idols which we think are so important. And, thanks be to God, we have a place to congregate every week, meet God, and receive His gifts.

Now, this is truly wonderful. But it is only the beginning. God has heaven reserved for us. We will someday be involved in the heavenly worship. We will see God face to face. We will experience the Lamb's presence directly, rather than through the indirect means of bread and wine. We will have no more need for confession and absolution for we will have no more sin. We will no longer struggle through difficult hymns, but, instead listen to the angelic choir sing sweet and beautiful praises to God in a new song which is richer and deeper than any praise song or any traditional hymn here can be. We will no longer be a small struggling congregation but we would be with all of God's people from every country, tribe and language answering with our praise and song. It will be an exciting experience -- never boring -- and it will last for all eternity.

It is my prayer that every member of our congregation will understand the reason we worship and all of the gifts God wants to give us so that every member will want to be involved in worship every Sunday. If your heart is right with God and attuned to Him, then worship is the highlight of your week. In heaven, worship cannot be boring. Here, it does not have to be boring, no matter what form or expression of worship is used. I pray that God gives each of you a joyful worship experience here in our church while you live on earth and an even more joyful worship experience in heaven while you live forever. Amen