

Revelation 7:9-17, Matthew 5:1-12

Blessing, Glory, Wisdom and Thanksgiving

Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen. (Rev 7:12).

These are words that we just heard in John's vision that is the book of Revelation. Now I have not preached on Revelation often. That is because it is literature that takes a little delving into. John's vision does not feel all that uplifting and with ancient stories and modern apocalyptic literature and movies bringing in all kinds of messages and fears, it feels like it takes even more to unpack a book such as Revelation.

Many of us have watched movies where it is the end of the world and people are left behind while loved ones are obliterated or missing. I will be honest in saying that I am not one who cares for that genre, well that and horror movies. I have a rather vivid imagination, coupled with a strong emotional response, so I find my life is calmer when I don't consider those possibilities. Thankfully for writers and tv and movie producers there are many others who will pay money to be frightened or filled with suspense. I have enough dealing with what is before me right now, the people and situations, without thinking too much about the future.

And yet, even the Bible delves into these kinds of stories and Revelation is a prime example. If you haven't read Revelation then you might not realize that it is filled with powerful imagery of destruction and ruin. But there are also passages that talk about streets of gold, a New Jerusalem, beauty, hope, possibility and promise. The promise that at some point, with all that we experience and will yet experience, God will wipe every tear from our eye.

Now I said I had a vivid imagination, and when I picture this, I see the hand of God gently touch my face and, in that moment, take all of my fear, pain, sorrow, and anxiety away. Then I look beyond myself and see God doing that very same act for everyone around me. This is my vision of God. The God of love who calls each and every one of us saints. God's beloved. God's children. Think of the person who has shown love toward you and know that their love for you does not even begin to show the depth of God's love for you.

The scripture passage from Matthew is what has been dubbed The Beatitudes. Each line a promise of a future that will be for those who are hurting, struggling, and challenged by what life has brought them.

⁴ 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵ 'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

⁷ 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

⁸ 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

And one that really hits home for us in a world that is experiencing so much unrest...

⁹ 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Often, we think of being blessed, as Professor at Luther Seminary Rolf Jacobson would say, a benefit conferred upon some one. Still, it could have been more accurately translated into English as honourable. Honourable are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Honourable are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Honourable are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

It is hard to feel blessed when things are going sideways. In fact, people only referred to being blessed when things are going well or they are in a good state of mind. But honourable...this is where Jesus situates himself with people. Jesus – God, is with those who are suffering. God understands suffering the suffering of humanity. Jesus experienced this suffering in his earthly life under the hands of authorities to the point of death. Jesus in life spent his time with those who were hungry, sick, in need of hope and health. That is not to say that Jesus is only present for those who suffer the most. We can all take heart in that in any and all suffering Jesus knows our pain, our anguish, our brokenness, and is present with us.

Jesus is also with us in our joy. It is the good shepherd who goes off to find that one lost sheep and comes back rejoicing. Or is like the woman who lost her coin and upon finding it rejoices. In other words, Jesus is present to us in all that we experience. And that is the promise of both the Beatitudes and the reading from Revelation. God is with us. Jesus is with us.

So these readings are about God with us now in our present and God with us in our future whether that be in our living or in our dying.

On this All Saints Day, when we celebrate those who have lived and we have loved, may I remind you that in the New Testament saints are not those who have been lifted up as having been over the top dedicated, amazing people of God. Saints in the New Testament are those who love Jesus and do their best to live their lives in the Spirit of Jesus. Those who love God and trust in the Holy Spirit to guide them. Those who, knowing they don't measure up, keep working toward becoming more the people of God they are called to be. Not because they have to, but because love and grace draws them in and our response is to pick ourselves up every time we fall short and try again.

I am going to read from Revelation 7 again. May you hear the hope that is in the scripture at a time when our world is feeling pulled apart. When people seem further from caring about each other and creation than it has felt for some time. May we witness God's promises in our lives.

Revelation 7, the vision of John, the lamb is Jesus...

⁹ After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰They cried out in a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!' ¹¹And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, ¹²singing,

'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen.'

¹³ Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, 'Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?' ¹⁴I said to him, 'Sir, you are the one that knows.' Then he said to me, 'These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'

¹⁵ For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.

¹⁶ They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat;

¹⁷ for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'