

The book of Revelation, which we hear from today, requires its own dictionary and I'd like to spend some time with a bit of its unique language today. In today's reading, it's hoped that God shall be hailed and honored forever and ever. The language of "forever and ever" recalls how Revelation often describes God as the One who was, is, and shall be. This is an uncommon, but highly powerful way to describe God. It communicates that God and his throne have been around forever and shall endure forever as well. Way back in the beginning, God's sovereignty was uncontested; allowing God to create heaven and earth in just six days according to Genesis chapter one. Since then, God's sovereignty has been challenged, but to no lasting effect. God's throne endures. God and God's way shall win in the end. God was, is, and shall be. It's Good News for us today and tomorrow.

It's Good News today because it tells us baptism counts for something. Today we remember some of those who were baptized in the past year. Did these baptisms count for something? The answer is they did. God's throne endures. God's edicts do not evaporate. God was, is, and shall be. As our reading from Revelation informs us, the baptized, wearing white robes in our text, as they often do on the day of baptism, have been washed white in the blood of the Lamb. They're God's children now, as our reading from 1st John puts it, and bound for the heavenly choir described by our reading from Revelation. Does baptism count for something? Oh yes it does!

Jesus instituted baptism according to the will of the One who was, is, and shall be. With baptism being one of them, the edicts of the One who was, is, and shall be do not evaporate. This may not be common knowledge and we may doubt it sometimes, but it will happen. God was, is, and shall be. The baptized are headed for victory where white will be the only color in their closet and the palm branches of victory shall be the tools of their trade forever and ever. This matters so much that we can even greet death with enduring and defiant hope.

Having that kind of hope is important today we read the names of some of the baptized who have died in the last year. As we read their names, we do it in defiant hope; insisting that their light has not burned out, but instead shines on in Jesus, the Light of the World the darkness could not and cannot overcome. To be sure, there's a lot about this we don't understand on this side of the hereafter. Whenever a funeral is conducted according to the Lutheran liturgy, one of the prayers openly acknowledges that death thrusts us into the midst of things we cannot understand. But the pray goes on to say that we can still trust and believe in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, and the resurrection to life everlasting.

The reason for this defiant hope gets back to Revelation's uncommon language. God was, is, and shall be. God's throne and God's edicts endure. Even though they shall die, the baptized are bound for victory. They've been washed white in the blood of the Lamb and so it shall remain. God, the One who was, is, and shall be, has ordained and orchestrated it, and so, no matter what may come, white robes and the palm branches of victory await the baptized. God was, is, and shall be. It's why our reading from 1st John defiantly insists that we don't need to know all the details about what happens after death. By way of adoption through baptism, we're God's children now and that means we always will be. Our adoptive Father through baptism was, is, and shall be. The edict of our adoptive Father endures. It's Good News today and Good News tomorrow.

As to tomorrow, tomorrow shall be the time for us to get back to living as God's children in the world of our present. Today we pause to embrace joyfully and gratefully what baptism shall mean for us in the future. Tomorrow we get back to how baptism is meant to inform and to inspire our present. Here too the unique language of Revelation can be of assistance. Today our

reading from Revelation calls Jesus the Lamb four times, with the same description showing up another twenty-six times throughout the rest of the letter. It's language that recalls how Jesus is imaged or described as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world in the gospel of John, but it's also distinct. To understand how Revelation does its own thing with the idea that Jesus is a lamb you have to go back to chapters four and five where Revelation's tour of God's throne room begins.

In those chapters, Jesus eventually bursts onto the scene, with the heavenly throng singing the words responsible for the part of the Lutheran liturgy often called "This is the Feast," but more properly called "Worthy is Christ." Leading up to this grand entrance Jesus is billed as the Lion of Judah. It sounds like Jesus is some sort of strong man. It sounds like Jesus is a warrior the likes of which would have intimidated even General George H. Patton. It sounds like Jesus is some kind of fierce and intimidating presence. Think the mountain lion that recently chased after a jogger in Utah. But this isn't how it turns out.

Jesus shows up not as a fierce and intimidating lion, but as a bloody Lamb poked full of holes. And unlike in the gospel of John, Jesus isn't a grown lamb ready for sacrifice. In Revelation, Jesus is a fluffy, innocent, adorable, itsy-bitsy baby lamb who's been poked full of holes. And it's the blood of this meek, little creature which washes us white according to the book of Revelation. This fluffy, innocent, adorable, itsy-bitsy baby lamb poked full of holes is the faithful witness according to the book of Revelation; the very definition of purity and righteousness. He's our standard bearer and majorette. He's the way forward. He's the one we are to follow in this life until we don white robes and wave the palm branches of victory with the rest of the baptized forever and ever. And when it comes to how we follow our Lord, the fluffy, innocent, adorable, itsy-bitsy lamb poked full of holes, I'd say our reading from Matthew fills in the blanks very well.

We follow Jesus by hungering and thirsting for righteousness; hungering and thirsting for a society where resources and opportunities are allocated rightly; hungering and thirsting for a society where things are right in all families and between any and all neighbors; where relationships rightly come first and where the health and wellbeing of the community also comes first because they do. When our hunger and thirst for righteousness is not satisfied, we mourn just our reading from Matthew says we will. But we also get up and try again, even if it means we take a few pokes and suffer through some persecution in the process. This is what here and now followers of the Lamb do. Through tears and struggle, they defiantly demand right relations in all families all and between all neighbors. Though tears and struggle, they keep getting up and traveling across the bridge that separates them, their families, and their neighbors from righteousness. But like John Lewis, one of the saints who joined the Church Triumphant this past year, this isn't done arrogantly, aggressively, or violently. As Jesus says today, followers of the Lamb, children of God by baptism, aren't arrogant; aren't aggressive; aren't violent. Rather than being those things, they're poor in spirit, pure of heart, and meek. They're fluffy, innocent, adorable, itsy-bitsy baby lambs who pack more of a wallop than any lion ever could. In, by, and through the Holy Spirit, may we be those lambs now and until whatever we shall be is fully and finally revealed thanks to the God who was, is, and shall be. Amen!