

2025 Easter 3C

“Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered...”

Whenever the book of Revelation comes up in Bible study, either because we have a reading from or because someone has heard it quoted—or misquoted—by someone who takes it all out of context, I end up saying basically the same thing over and over again.

It was not written to make us afraid—and if it’s making us afraid, we need to ask ourselves why.

The Book of Revelation was written for followers of Christ in the early church, called “The Way” in that reading from Acts, because they were being persecuted, threatened, and even killed for their faith. The people who try to claim that there is some sort of “anti-Christian bias” in our culture have no idea what it really means to be punished for being a follower of Jesus.

In those days when both the religious leadership of Israel and the civil authorities of the Roman Empire were on a mission to silence the dissenters, one couldn’t speak openly about their faith in Jesus Christ. He had been executed because they thought he was trying to start a revolution.

The irony is, it was his execution and its aftermath that lit the flame. It was the news of the Resurrection that gave people hope that all that “kingdom of God” stuff Jesus preached might have been true. It was the evidence of transformation in people like Peter and Paul that gave them the courage to share that Good News. To claim that the power of God is greater than any power of empire, and would eventually prevail.

But in the meantime, there was going to be suffering and pain and heartache. Empires don’t go down without a fight.

The Book of Revelation is a word of challenge and hope to those people who were feeling defeated. It used fantastical imagery, some of it from the prophets and some of it more Greek in origin, to encourage to stand firm. Don’t give up hope. Look for signs of the kingdom breaking through the cracks and growing until it squeezes the empire right out of the way.

If you were a first-century follower of Christ, you would have been tuned into the imagery used, and you would have recognized that there were some really provocative—even subversive—statements about what was really worthy to receive “power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.”

Despite what they might hear in the Roman temples, the worthy object of all that adulation was *not* Caesar.

No, it was “the lamb that was slaughtered.”

I kind of wish the lectionary included in today’s reading an earlier section of this passage, in which the author begins this ‘worthiness’ talk by referring to the Lion of the tribe of Judah, an image that would have been familiar to a Jewish audience as one of the ways of talking about the Messiah. The text then quickly equates that lion, that image of power and strength and domination through violence, and flips it on its head. Because that Lion becomes the Lamb. The one that was slaughtered, like a Passover sacrifice. The one who negates the power of death by going *through* it and coming out the other side.

The Roman Empire held the threat of torture and death over the heads of those they oppressed. Fear is the most effective tool of every Empire....and also its downfall.

What is that Janis Joplin song? Freedom is just another word for nothing left to lose.

Eventually, what any empire offers in exchange for good behavior is not worth what is lost, and people start looking around for something that is truly worthy of praise and honor and thanksgiving etc., etc., etc.

The kingdom of God, even with its challenges, looks a lot more worthy of one's energy and adoration than anything the world can offer.

Peter and Paul, each in their own way, come to realize that in today's readings. Paul, here called by his Jewish name Saul, has an encounter with the Risen Christ that will eventually lead him to declare that the only thing worth anything is to know and follow Christ. Peter will come to see that no one but God gets to decide what and who is worthy of God's love and grace. And that lesson begins with himself.

Both Peter and Paul have a story to tell about the moment when Jesus confronted the worst of them and offered something better...something of real, kingdom of God, worth. Letting go of the world's expectations of them, allowing Jesus to show them their worth despite their failures—that makes them the leaders they become. Their success comes by allowing God to take their failures and bring some good out of it.

Think about the people whose stories inspire you. Maybe it's just me, but I find much more comfort in knowing that God doesn't give up on us when we're at our worst. Instead, God offers grace and a new beginning. I think about someone I know who has been a recovering alcoholic for over 50 years. She shares her story of failures and imperfections with humility and

grace—and that inspires others to risk facing the hard truths about themselves. Because if the woman she was can become the woman she is, surely there is hope for themselves as well. I am sure she as a recovering alcoholic has played a far greater role in improving the lives of many more people than any self-righteous preacher shaking his finger at them in judgment.

The transforming power of God's grace will redeem even the worst that happens, if we allow it. That is the power of the story of the Lamb that was slaughtered. The apparent defeat and humiliation are part of the greater story. In giving itself over to death, it brought life to the world. The story of the empire just can't compete with the story of how the Lamb that was slaughtered ultimately becomes the one seated on the throne.

Worthy is the lamb that was slaughtered. To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever. Amen. Alleluia.