

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lamb who was slain, Jesus Christ, our Savior and our Lord, amen.

I really needed to read and study this passage from the Apocalypse of John this week. I mean it's been a pretty frustrating and busy week. I really needed to hear once again this description of Heaven and Heavenly Worship. With Covid on the attack again and my niece in Alabama and her husband both contracting this new Delta variant, as well as some here in our own congregation, this round of the Pandemic seems to be hitting even harder than it did last year, mostly for those who are not vaccinated. Add to that, my frustration with a certain furniture company who has promised us delivery of our new kitchen table and chairs since March and they keep scheduling delivery and then cancelling at the last minute or not even cancelling, just failing to show up. All this has my blood sugars on the rise and my iron levels on the run. Yes, life can get to the best of us and wear us down to the point of breaking...

That's why this reading from the 4th chapter of the book of Revelation came as such a breath of fresh air this week. I really needed to hear and visualize the how stunningly beautiful worshipping our great, almighty, and all knowing God can be. As I read all the commentaries about this chapter of Revelation, I kept hitting a dead end when it came to the Gospel and the Good News of Jesus Christ, until I received the call from Morris Furniture 1 hour before the scheduled delivery

time saying they had to cancel yet again and there was no rescheduling because the table was damaged. That's when I went back to the text and re-read this wonderful description of heavenly worship. As angry and frustrated as I was, there before me I saw clearly those 24 elders and the four living creatures all worshipping God with their entire being. They weren't distracted by all the commotion of life. They simply cast down their golden crowns around that glassy sea and gave everything they had to the worship of their Lord and God. As I meditated on that amazing scene somehow my anger and frustration diminished, and I was filled with peace. My troubles seemed not so important in comparison to this mighty God with all the thunder, lightning, and rainbows...

I just kept thinking about how lucky John was to be invited into such an intimate gathering of God's inner circle, God's Heavenly Council. This is what the book of Revelation offers us today, a glimpse into heaven. I've had people tell me they can't read Revelation because it's just too scary. All the beasts and monsters, all the disasters that devastate the earth... Add to all this fantastic imagery all the interpretations of what this book means and how they claim it describes or predicts the end times. Pastors like John Haggy from San Antonio literally frightening people with his predictions of forth coming doom and gloom for all Christians, at least for those left behind. It's no wonder this book has been one that's either

shunned out of fear or studied for some piece of evidence that the end times are upon us.

I will tell you right up front; I believe the Book of Revelation was written in the late first or early 2nd century by a man names John who was writing to his Church family from a prison on the island of Patmos off the coast of Greece. John tells us from the beginning he was “In the Spirit” on the Lord’s Day when this revelation was given to him. In other words, Eldon you’ll appreciate this, John was asleep in Church during Worship on a Sunday when he saw this vision. That’s right, the Book of Revelation is the dream John had while he was asleep during the pastor’s sermon. Have you ever tried to describe a dream to your spouse, family or friends? It’s no wonder we have descriptions of seven headed beasts and famines that ravage the earth.

Actually, this book is a little more than just the superficial dream of an old man. If John was in fact exiled to the small island of Patmos and if he was also one of the elders of the Church in Ephesus, he probably wrote this document to his Church family back home. Since he was a prisoner, he knew all his letters would be opened and read by his captors before being allowed to be sent off the island. That’s why John wrote this book in a sort of code language. He was trying to get the letter past his guards so his Church family could read and learn from his experience. The codes for things like the beast were meant to be the Roman

Empire. The people who originally heard or read this letter would have immediately known who or what the beast represented. John wasn't writing this letter to 21st century Christians, nor was he trying to give us some sort of secret code for how to interpret the signs of the end. We've imposed all of that onto the text.

So, then, let's take a closer look at this Heavenly scene. Before we can understand fully today's glimpse into heaven, let's look at the context of this worship in the throne room of God. So far in Revelation, there have been portions of this letter addressed to the seven churches in Asia. The final church addressed in chapter 3, just before our text for today, has Jesus standing at the door of the lukewarm Church of Laodicea. Jesus says to this congregation that he's standing at their door knocking and if they open the door to him, he will come into their Church and stay with them. (SLIDE) This scene is often misinterpreted as being addressed to each individual person. And if we only open the doors of our hearts and ask Jesus to be our Savior and our Lord, then we will be saved. That's clearly not what Jesus was saying to the Laodicean Church. His words were addressed to the entire congregation not to individuals. Once you understand that fact, then what comes next makes a whole lot more sense. In our text for today, John is invited through the open door into heaven to witness this incredible worship scene. The truth is, Christ has already opened the door to heaven, but we keep our earthly

doors closed to his presence. How sad is that... How do we keep our doors closed to Jesus today at Trinity? Do we have barriers that keep Jesus out? When our worship practices emphasize our individual practices and piety, where it's just you and God or you and Jesus, we're keeping Jesus from coming into our Worship in a much more meaningful way. That is my earnest desire, for us to worship in such a way that we give up our selves as individuals and become one, even as the grains of wheat, once scattered on the hill become one bread, we are gathered from across this territory to become one people of God. We do that by eating of one loaf of bread and drinking from one cup of salvation which are the body and blood of our Savior, Jesus. In so doing we're removing our crowns, all our selfish, self-centered attitudes and ways and surrendering our entire bodies, minds, and souls to God our Father. Did you notice who was at the center of this worship scene? God is on His throne and everything else is around that throne. Humans are not at the center... You aren't at the center of God's throne, that place is reserved for God alone.

At this point we probably need to lighten things up a bit... Did you hear about the electrician who became a priest? He had a shocking revelation... I think sometimes we take ourselves and our life too seriously. Sometimes we just need to forget our troubles and cares and throw our crowns at the feet of the throne of God and abandon ourselves to the worship experience. I don't know about you, but my crown is too heavy and takes up so much of my energy just keeping it in place and

protected from all the people who covet it or who try to tell me I'm wearing it incorrectly... Worshipping God rightly. We are finally able to safely remove our crowns and give them back to the one where they belong in the first place.

Thanks be to God for opening the door of heaven so we could get this glimpse of true, pure worship. May we continually examine our own Worship practices to find places where we are keeping our door closed to the presence of Jesus. May God bless you with your own invitation to come and worship even if it means dreaming during the sermon... May we never become lukewarm to the invitation of Jesus, but always stay open to experience His glorious presence right here in our little slide of heaven we call Trinity Lutheran Church. Amen.