

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from both the Lion of Judah and the Lamb who was sacrificed, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, amen.

I love Superman. When I was a member of Abiding Christ in Fairborn, I was selected to play the part of Superman, er, um, Clark Kent in the musical “It’s A Bird, It’s A Plane, It’s Superman.” Talk about stepping out of your comfort zone... Not only did I have to sing solo, I had to do it in tights and in one song while fighting the three bad guys all at the same time... It gets you over your fear of speaking in public, that’s for sure! So, as you can imagine, I love the character of Clark Kent and his alter ego Superman. I love that Superman is this strong as steel faster than a speeding bullet superhero who always fights for freedom, justice, and the American way and, as Superman declares in one song, “... never stop doing good.” So, for the next few minutes, let’s put aside all the gray areas, the fake news, and the lies we’re told every day by the devil and assume we can still tell the difference between right and wrong. Then Superman is our guy. That is, unless you happen to have a pile of Kryptonite, but otherwise, he’s invincible!

The thing I really love about Superman is that he’s not just a one dimensional or flat character. There’s also a soft side to this protector of Metropolis, he has a soft, velvet side too. He loves Lois Lane. He’s compassionate and kind. He even cries. When I played the part of Superman I had to cry as Superman laments over his broken heart as Lois Lane was attracted to

another character. As Superman I opined, why do I have to have this vulnerable side that seems to always break my heart. Why can't the strongest man in the world be the happiest man as well...

Velvet and steel, the two natures or sides of Superman are also the two sides of Jesus described in this second throne scene from the Book of Revelation. One of the elders tells John not to weep because there is one worthy to open the scroll and that one is the Lion of Judah. When I think about the phrase The Lion of Judah or lions in general, there's so much Old Testament and other images from nature. First of all, the lion is the king of the jungle and the king of all the beasts. Lions in the wild are feared. It's been said that a native of Africa, where lions still roam free, who is afraid of lions lives longer than one who is not afraid of them. Lions are fierce and mighty. Of all the twelve tribes of Israel, Judah was the tribe where all the Kings were from. When the tribes were nomadic and wandering around in the wilderness, they all developed flags or standards so you could tell where the tribe of Benjamin ended and the tribe of Zebulun began, for example. Each of these flags had their own special symbol that identified who they were. Think about the symbols for various football or baseball teams. My former favorite team the Cleveland Indians recently changed their logo from Chief Yahoo to some kind of Guardian. I was hoping they would sell the name to their stadium

to the Samsung Mobile Phone Company. Then they could be Guardians of the Galaxy...

Getting back to my story... Guess what the picture was on the flag of the tribe of Judah... If you guessed a lion you win the grand prize for today... So, in our text, the elder says to John look at the Lion of Judah, but when John looks what he sees is something different altogether. He sees, instead of a roaring lion, a lamb looking as if it had been slaughtered. This lamb has 7 horns and 7 eyes. In Bible numerology the number 7 stands for the perfect or complete. The horn was the symbol for strength and power and the eye was the symbol for knowledge or wisdom. So, having the perfect number of both horns and eyes, this slaughtered lamb is both all powerful and all knowing. Jesus is like my description of Superman in that He is also both velvet and steel at the same time.

This is what your English teacher would have called an oxymoron. An oxymoron is a phrase that uses words having the exact opposite meanings. Here's few examples of that I mean... Jumbo shrimp... Pretty ugly... Clearly confused... Act naturally... Congressional Ethics... Tight slacks... And my personal favorite the short sermon... See what I mean? Steel-velvet fit right in with these other oxymoronic phrases. From now until the end of the Book of Revelation Jesus is referred to as the Lamb of God over 20 times, while by other names only 6 or 7 times. Sometimes this makes for very interesting verbal

imagery. For example, in Revelation 6:16 John writes, “hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!” Ever see an angry lamb? What will it do? Show its teeth? Make its wool stand up on the back of its neck? Bleat at you?

Then in Chapter 17 it says, they will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings--and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers. You don't usually picture a lamb as a mighty general, winning a war, but that's the Jesus as revealed to us in Revelation. John the Baptist introduces Jesus by saying, “Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.” The Lion of Judah is also the lamb of sacrifice. If we take a look at what we know about Jesus, it is very clear. His words show He was lion and lamb. The same Jesus who harshly rebukes the hypocrisy of the Jews of Jerusalem, weeps over the city because they rejected Him... Jesus, the One with authority over death, shouts for Lazarus to come out of the grave, but doesn't open his mouth to defend His own life in front of Herod... His actions show He was lion and lamb as well. Jesus, the Master, also stoops to do the lowliest servant's job of washing the feet of his disciples... Jesus, whose presence makes the demons beg Him to go easy them, is also the Jesus who takes children in His arms and blesses them... In fact, His whole purpose of coming to earth was full of being both lion and lamb. Jesus commanded the wind and waves

to be still, but didn't threaten those who were crucifying Him nor did he order His angels to the rescue... Jesus, who was the light of life, endured the worst of darkness all for you... Jesus, Who is the Bread of Life, allowed Himself to go hungry when tempted by the devil... Jesus, Who exists in the form of God, empties Himself to become a helpless human baby... Jesus, the Lord of life, allowed his own lifeless body to be laid in the tomb, for you and for all people... Jesus, the great physician who healed so many of their physical ills, is crushed for our iniquities, bruised for our transgressions... Jesus, Who is the Good Shepherd, is led like a lamb to the slaughter... Yes, Jesus is the perfect combination of steel and velvet – Lion and Lamb.

As the lion, Jesus is able to help us through our times of trouble. He has already overcome the biggest enemy we face as humans, death itself. The oxymoronic thing is, Jesus did that by laying his life down for us. The most courageous act is also the most self-less act of love the world has ever known. That's the kind of Savior and Lord we follow and worship. When you do follow Jesus, you also become part of His family. You become part of a community of faithful believers who love each other and take care of each other – people who have got your back when you need it most. You are a part of a family of people who are for the most part, free from the love of money, who care for their families, who are honest and genuine saints. You are also a part of that very same

community that can sometimes act harsh and judgmental. Part of a sinful community. For all our faults, we are a part of a living Kingdom that doesn't exist just to feed itself, but to venture out into its world and engage in meaningful service. You are a part of a trust, established by God, to organize and use His resources for projects that are an ongoing, exciting adventure. I want to always be part of this family of God.

Thanks be to God for giving us both a Lion who ferociously defends and protects us from sin, death, and the devil, but also the lamb who wins victory through his suffering and death all the while never lifting a finger in violent retribution. God gives us both a Lion as our Lord and a Lamb as our Savior. May we like the elders, and the four living creatures, give our Lamb all blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever, as we never tire nor stop doing good in His Name, amen!