

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

“Heaven’s Song”

Revelation 5:11-14

The performance was nearly over. For several hours the audience sat in rapt attention, completely focused on an oratorio most of them had heard dozens of times before. From the first strains of the overture by the orchestra, through the solos and choral selections by the mass choir, both musicians and audience alike were inspired by the stirring message of Handel’s “Messiah.”

And now the sea of voices blended one more time into a mighty crescendo as the chorus rang out, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain ... blessing and honor, glory and power be unto him, unto him, that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb ... forever and ever, forever and ever, forever and ever. Amen!”

As those words pulsed in the hearts and minds of all who were present, one man was heard to say that it was like heaven itself were open to him and God himself was present.

One can’t really read the words of today’s second reading from the book of Revelation without thinking of Handel’s “Messiah” or at least the hymn of praise from one of our orders of service in the hymnal and, with that, having a small glimpse of heaven once again too. In that glimpse we find ourselves transported from this world filled with so many less-than-perfect sights and sounds into the heavenly world filled with the perfect sights and sounds of a God who is present in all his glory and majesty.

But that glimpse inevitably fades away and we find ourselves, as it always seems to be following the celebration of Easter, back to business as usual – back to the mundane world of diapers and dishpans, of assembly lines and cafeteria lines, of term papers and newspapers.

And we wonder – is this what life is like – the regular and the routine interrupted only periodically by a glimpse of the heavenly and then back to the regular and the routine once again? Is there a way this glimpse of heaven can last and shape and enliven every one of our moments, not just on Sunday morning but on Monday morning as well? Can these moments of inspiration be sustained throughout the week and can we have a taste of heaven every day here on earth?

God’s answer to us in His Word is a resounding “Yes” – “yes” there is more to life than the regular and the routine – “yes” there is a way in which these glimpses of heaven can shape and enliven every moment of our lives – “yes” such inspiration can be sustained and “yes” we can have a taste of heaven every day. But the answer is “yes” only when our focus is like the focus of the angels in heaven – if our focus is on the Lamb, Jesus Christ, and on praising and serving him in what we think, say and do. And central to that focus is what we celebrated just a couple of weeks ago – his atoning death and his vicarious resurrection on our behalf.

There's so much in this world that can steal that focus, that can sidetrack us from living lives that are truly happy and meaningful and fulfilling, that can downright depress us and, if we let it, destroy us, if that is what we focus on. And, unfortunately, many do. But if we focus on Jesus Christ, on what he did for us, on what he's doing for us today, and on what he will do for us tomorrow – we can be lifted up, put back on track and have, as we sing in one of our offertories, the joy of our salvation restored.

I would suggest to you that is what our worship together is really all about. It's a glimpse of heaven right here on earth. But, by the grace of God, that glimpse doesn't need to be limited to just our worship. It can be what each and every day is about not only when our focus is on Christ and not on ourselves and on his blessings and not on our troubles.

The revelation recorded in this book called The Revelation of St. John was given first to those who were in the midst of some pretty severe trials and troubles and tribulations at the hands of the Roman empire in order that their vision might be refocused from earth to heaven and, with that, from despair to hope. And that's what it did. And as it was for those believers so long ago so it can be for us today. God's Word would lift our vision from the mundane to the sublime, from the ordinary to the extraordinary, and, in that, restore our hope for the future.

It's said that the Roman general Constantine had a vision in 312A.D. that if he replaced the Roman eagle on top of his banners with a Christian cross, he would be victorious in his battle for the position of emperor of Rome. In this vision he saw a cross formed by the first two letters of Christ's name in Greek – “Chi” and “Rho” – accompanied by the Latin inscription “In hoc signo vinces”, which means “in this sign you shall conquer.” Constantine did indeed replace the eagle with the cross and he won the battle. Eventually, he not only embraced the Christian faith, he also legalized it throughout the empire and, in that, ended almost three hundred years of persecution for Christians. But it all started with a vision.

So, too, we are more than conquerors through Christ who loved us, who died for us, and who rose again and lives for us today. That's what Paul must have had in mind when he wrote the words of Romans 8 – “neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.”

You see, when we feel separated from God it is because we have taken our focus off of Christ and put it somewhere else. But when, by the grace of God, we refocus on Christ – and not just today but everyday – we are more than conquerors. And, in that, John's vision becomes our vision and the angel's song becomes our song.

May God bless us all to that end today and every day throughout the coming week. And may He continue to bless our hearing, reading, studying and applying of His Word always. In Jesus' name. Amen.