

Revealing Revelation: Easter Worship Series

“Worthy is the Lamb”

Sermon Text: Revelation 5:11-14

FUMC, Arlington, TX 76011

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Hear the day’s lesson:

11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 12 singing with full voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”

13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, “To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

14 And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the elders fell down and worshiped (Rev 5:11-14).

Often in the church it is difficult to keep going as we try to maintain attentiveness with respect to the resurrection. The cat is out of the bag, God raises Jesus from the dead, same story—different day. “What’s new” we ask. Yet the resurrection is such a large TRUTH for Christians that it is right to take seven Sundays to explore what it means for us and for our faith. As God resurrects Jesus God makes Jesus our Lord and savior. For this reason alone we examine what the resurrection means for us.

Our lesson today resumes our series of six weeks’ worth of texts from Revelation. Remarkably, today’s lesson speaks to something important to previous generations of Christians. Yet modern folk forget or ignore the status of worship. Worship for twenty centuries was the chief calling card of those who called themselves Christians. Whether in the catacombs or in magnificent cathedrals, Christians confessed their faith in song, prayer, homily, and praise to the one we called “the firstborn of the dead.” Christian identity is in worship and it offers the faith community both shape and fellowship. We respond to God best in worship.

Our passage from Revelation refocuses our attention away from ourselves and toward

the God whom we worship. That is, when we concentrate on God, we necessarily redirect our attention away from our all too typical emphasis on self. We lose ourselves in the other—that is God Almighty. The scene depicted in our lesson is a slice of worship in the heavenly places. Those who worship are those who surround the throne. The hymns of praise are “to the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb.” In other words all the participant’s direct their praise and worship to God Almighty. And also in the throne room these creatures aim praise and worship toward Jesus—the slain lamb.

As we practice worship we are doing something incredibly counter-cultural. Our approach to society now is frantic. We’re anxious about productivity in a way that permeates most people’s minds. This perspective has become so deep-seated that we fail to realize how broken we have become. If you don’t believe me, then try to sit still for thirty minutes in one place without your phone, radio, or television being on. How long can you just “be?”

Fixed in worship is God’s power to save us. Enlivened by holy grace, for the good of the world, the church is present in worship’s speech and enactment via the Christ and the Spirit’s presence. In Jesus God has exposed all of the world’s false “gods.” Some idols may be ancient like the worship of Baal, Astarte, or Marduk—or a talisman or golden calf for example. Today we have up-to-date idols and we can understand them as power, pleasure, race, ancestors, the state, or money. God defeats the false gods and this world’s powers by the Lord of heaven and earth, Jesus Christ. For this reason we praise “the Lamb who was slain.” Our worship redirects self-worship (or at least preoccupation) to authentic worship of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When we offer ourselves in prayerful devotion to Revelation’s image of the slain Lamb which is enthroned over all things, then we put life and death into proper perspective. And in this attention to God, then God transforms us into the people God created us to be (many thanks to Michael Pasquarello III for insights into this text).

Wise Aristotle once wrote: “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act,

but a habit.” A bedrock habit as lived out in accord with the Christian faith is the habit of Sabbath keeping—of which worship is a significant part for Christians. Marva Dawn describes keeping the Sabbath as an exercise in ceasing, resting, embracing, and feasting (*Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, Eerdmans, 1989). That is as good a description of the Sabbath as I have ever seen.

As Christians we follow our Hebrew forbears by doing what they did on the Sabbath: we rest and we remember. We rest because God rested on the seventh day (*Genesis 2:2-3*). In addition to resting we also remember what God has done for us—we call this worship. Concretely for the Hebrews this involved bringing to consciousness the Exodus story. Jesus “the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (*Matthew 1:1*) lived this holy habit of worship. Luke writes, “When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom” (*Luke 4:16*; see also, *Matthew 12:9*; *13:54*; *Mark 1:21, 23, 29*; *Luke 4:38*; *Luke 6:6*). Jesus’ routine life included worship. Consider the commandment’s importance in the Hebrew Decalogue:

[8] Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. [9] Six days you shall labor and do all your work. [10] But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work--you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. [11] For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it (*Exodus 20*).

In a sense worship is similar to Stephen Covey’s woodcutter story. Have you ever heard this story about a time when people used hand tools rather than power tools? The point will soon become clear. A woodcutter strained to saw down a tree. A young man who was watching asked “What are you doing?”

“Are you blind?” the woodcutter replied. “I’m cutting down this tree.”

The young man was plainspoken. “You look exhausted! Take a break. Sharpen your saw.” The woodcutter explained to the young man that he had been sawing for hours and did not have time to take a break.

The young man responded: “If you sharpen the saw, you would cut down the tree much

faster.”

The woodcutter said “I don’t have time to sharpen the saw. Don’t you see I’m too busy?”

Worship is a time when we can quiet all the voices within us competing for attention.

We calm our inner turmoil and focus on God’s still small voice within us. If we can do this for just one hour a week, then the balance of our lives will be less anxious and therefore more productive. To worship the lamb is to take all of life and put this gift of life into a divine perspective.

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