

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 15, 2022

Psalm 148:1–14 (ESV):

Praise the Name of the Lord

148 Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!

2 Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his hosts!

3 Praise him, sun and moon,
praise him, all you shining stars!

4 Praise him, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!

5 Let them praise the name of the LORD!

For he commanded and they were created.

6 And he established them forever and ever;
he gave a decree, and it shall not pass away.

7 Praise the LORD from the earth,
you great sea creatures and all deeps,

8 fire and hail, snow and mist,
stormy wind fulfilling his word!

9 Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!

10 Beasts and all livestock,
creeping things and flying birds!

11 Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!

12 Young men and maidens together,
old men and children!

13 Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
his majesty is above earth and heaven.
14 He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his saints,
for the people of Israel who are near to him.
Praise the LORD!

EPISTLE: Acts 11:1–18 (ESV):

Peter Reports to the Church

11 Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. 2 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, 3 “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.” 4 But Peter began and explained it to them in order: 5 “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me. 6 Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. 7 And I heard a voice saying to me, ‘**Rise, Peter; kill and eat.**’ 8 But I said, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ 9 But the voice answered a second time from heaven, ‘**What God has made clean, do not call common.**’ 10 This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. 11 And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. 12 And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. 13 And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; 14 he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.’ 15 As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. 16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘**John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.**’ 17 If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” 18 When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

Gospel: Revelation 21:1–7 (ESV):

The New Heaven and the New Earth

21 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. **2** And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. **3** And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. **4** He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

5 And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” **6** And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. **7** The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

Sermon 20 – Fifth Sunday Of Easter

“Man-Dwelling God”

Revelation 21:1-7

Dear friends,

Our epistle lessons continue to be from the book of Revelation, and the given bit for today is from the later part of the book. The dragon has been thrown down, the whore of Babylon has burned, the lake of fire has eaten its fill. Basically, all sorts of wackjob images have been thrown at the Christian churches, all to share with them the truth that Jesus' triumph has already been written. It is already an eternal fact. Nevermind that we who continue to fight in the trenches in this world can't see that the enemy is already dead, the enemy is already dead, Jesus has won the victory, the devil's burning, everything is awesome.

The imagery that John uses to describe this victory, though, teaches us too. John writes: **“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.’”** This is the picture of Jesus' triumph, and that says a lot. Yes, earlier you get the devil being thrown into a lake of fire, the world being burned up, these are all things to look forward to, but the top of this, the big sign that Jesus has won for good, is this. God's people, adorned like a beautiful bride, as God's dwelling place.

John tells us that God lives with man, and all this stuff about the new Jerusalem and the decorations are just a fancy way of showing that. Why is this a big deal? Well, when you look around at the church, at Christians, you do not always think of them as being God's dwelling place. We think of God's dwelling place as heaven. Too often we think of heaven as the place where God kicks off his shoes, hangs up his coat, and reads the evening paper. But John says, no it ain't heaven, God's dwelling place is here. Among us. John writes this to reassure some scared churches that God hasn't dropped the ball, that God isn't squatting in heaven waiting for them to do the right things. Where does God live? God lives in the church, among the people that He has adopted as His through the waters of Baptism, you and I.

We talk about church being God's house, but church has never been about buildings or things made by the hands of men. The church is all those that believe that they are sinners, and that Jesus Christ suffered and died for their sins. Jesus dwells in men because He has made US His temples, He has made us His holy place, and He has done this through the preaching and reading of the Word of Scripture. Need proof of that? We eat and drink His body and His blood when we gather for Communion. Take eat, it's actually Jesus, given for you to make you holy. To make you His bride, His treasure, the thing for which He will literally go straight to hell for.

The eyes lie, people. They lie. We look with our eyes and we don't see holiness. We don't see upright Christian virtue, we see sin. We see imperfection. We see... us. We're just average joes and average janets trying to do the right thing in a world that no longer makes sense to us, and more often than not we're not all that successful at it, and even when we are, it feels awfully rotten. Isn't the Christian church supposed to be something more than... all of this?

No, it isn't. It never was back in ye olden days. The churches John was writing to, some of them harbored heretics and listened to them. Some of them were flirting with other gods, engaging in sexual immorality. Some of them were just plain lazy, and didn't give a hoot anymore. These aren't shining examples of Christian awesomeness, they're just churches. Filled with human sinners who need a God to dwell with them and make them holy. The eyes lie.

We like to harp on the world to come, and I have said to you repeatedly that this world is dying. I say these things to you to get you to see that this life isn't the real deal, that there's something better waiting for you. I say these things to you to caution you against becoming too attached to this world, which is a danger for all of us. But John today reminds us of another truth to keep in mind. The dwelling place of God is with man right now.

“5 And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” 6 And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. 7 The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.”

Christ says He is making all things new. This isn't a one-time deal that will happen at the end of time, it is what He has been promising all along. Sin means we need to be made new every day, and Jesus' sacrifice on the cross makes it possible for us to do this. This is, in the end, what the Christian life is all about. Being made new every day through repentance and through believing that Jesus has taken our sins from us. We wake every day to a new day, and Jesus tells us here that we wake every day to a new life and a new

soul. It is done, Jesus says. The life we have we have in Christ, and He makes us new every day. One day, He will make the world anew, and that is why we have hope despite how grim things look sometimes. We need a new world because we trashed this one. We messed it up with our sin and we can't seem to fix it. This new world and our new selves are linked together. This new world is where our new souls and our new bodies will dwell. We're still waiting for Jesus' return to see it, but until Jesus returns we pray for it and for all that comes.

Christ promises to slake our thirst. It begs a question, though. What are we thirsty for? Thirst is a fundamental need. It is not something that can be ignored for long. You can't just tough out thirst, you have to answer it. Your body depends on a regular supply of water for countless things and God designed it so that when your body is low on water, it will let you know very loudly and very painfully when it needs more. Thirst is torture if you cannot satisfy it. I think that's why God chooses this metaphor. What do we thirst for? Think of the Beatitudes. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. We thirst for righteousness, and we don't just thirst for that ourselves. We know we need forgiveness for our sins, we know we need Christ to make us righteous, but that isn't the only righteousness that you and I thirst for, is it? We thirst for a righteous world, a righteous life, we want all things and all people to be the way they should be. That's one of the big challenges of being Christian, is living in an unrighteous world. We want things to go the right way. We want people to do the right things. We want the world to behave itself and do what its supposed to do. We want the same for ourselves and our sinful nature. That thirst is one God deliberately nurtures in His people, and He does this so can satisfy it as He promises here. He gives it without price. He gave it to you without price. It starts with a righteous self, God giving you your new life in Christ, and it continues with your righteous neighbors, God giving you your fellow Christians so you can be surrounded by that. God will give other good things, other little righteousnesses, too. But He will never fully satisfy you, not in this life. Why? Because the life of the world to come is where that righteousness will be most fully satisfied. Your soul wants that, not life in this world. That soul is what I urge you to listen to.

Christ reminds us that He is the one who conquers sin and death, and that He has given us this as His heritage. He has given us His conquest. We don't conquer. It is not our job to fix things, it is not our job to fix ourselves or our children. It is not our job to fix the church or the world. We just can't do it. Jesus goes way beyond fixing. He conquers. All your fears, He conquers. All your flaws, He conquers. All the world's misery, He conquers. The inevitability of sin and death, He conquers. Jesus knocks them down and keeps them down and they cannot threaten who we really are anymore. They can make us feel bad. They can make us look bad. But they cannot change the deepest fundamental essence of ourselves. They cannot take us away from God.

God looks at you and calls you sons, calls you heirs, of His promise. That is how we shall overcome. By stepping back and staying with Christ and letting Him do the real work. We can't tackle these problems. He can. He's patient with them, and that's frustrating, we wish He'd just fix it now, but that's because He's patient with us, His sons.

Amen.