

Third Sunday in Easter
Year C
May 5, 2019

Acts 9:1-20 ~ Psalm 30 ~ Revelation 5:11-14 ~ John 21:1-19

Most – if not all of you – know the story of the disciples going fishing and catching nothing until Jesus calls them to breakfast on the beach. And you know how Jesus undoes Peter’s denials with the three-fold call to feed his sheep, tend his lambs.

All of you know the words from Revelation: Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and blessing. We regularly sing them as a hymn of praise; they were part of our liturgy again today. Ever wonder where those words come from? This is the place: the Book of Revelation.

In this image, that of the Lamb who was slaughtered, Revelation shows its connection to the Gospel of John, which we have been reading from quite a bit lately ... Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, last Sunday with Thomas, this Sunday. Like the other gospels, when Jesus fully appears on the scene for the first time as an adult, John the Baptizer introduces him. In the Gospel of John, that introduction is “Behold the Lamb of God” ... “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Then that language all but disappears and any subsequent reference to sheep invokes Jesus as the shepherd ... leading into Peter’s call to tend the sheep, be a shepherd.

We’re going to talk about Jesus as the Good Shepherd next Sunday. So, let’s leave off there and go back to the Lamb image in Revelation today ...

“Worthy is the lamb,” sings the whole community around the throne of God ... angels and living creatures, elders, myriads of thousands ... Who are these?!? Where are we – heaven and/or earth? Around a throne? What throne? Whose throne? The words may be familiar, but the setting is not. Feel like we’ve just been dropped in the middle of something?

Actually, we have. A couple of things happened before this moment of all worship breaking out in heaven – and on earth – as happens quite often in Revelation. All those terrors and trials and tribulations you may have heard about in popular books or movies or what-not in popular culture? Yeah, these are indeed in this Book of Revelation (or Revealing). But there are scenes of incredible worship and beauty as well. Every terrible thing that happens in this book is ended and undone by a scene of worship. What we read today is the first worship event that happens ... and before it came a sad, bad thing ... kind of like how we started into worship this morning.

In the case of our reading from Revelation, however, the sad thing is not a death or a loss that has happened. It’s a loss that is going to happen unless someone can step up and do something. God, the One on the throne, has a message. That message is represented by a scroll in God’s hand. But so far, none can be found to take the scroll and open the seals and relay God’s message. John, the one who is receiving this revelation ... watching these events, begins to cry

because no one is coming forward to take the scroll, to open the seals, to be the messenger. God has something to say, but with no messenger, no one will hear.

Then comes a lamb – not a fully-grown sheep, but a lamb. And not a fluffy white one, either. This lamb bears the marks of slaughter. This lamb has been killed but yet is living. It's Jesus, of course. You don't need a New Testament professor to tell you that. This lamb takes the scroll and then all worship breaks out.

So, what is the message? The Lamb is the message. Nothing more is said of the actual message. Things will happen as the seals are opened. But the scroll itself is not read. The Lamb is the substance of the message; Jesus is the message. The one who was dead and yet still lives is the message. This is the good news.

This is what Peter is to do to tend the sheep and feed the lambs: give them the good news – the one who died now lives. The final answer is life, not death. The one who denied, who said no again and again, now says yes – yes to the good news, yes to the life, yes to the love, yes to sharing the life and the love and the great good news.

Someone once said (and I have not had time to look it up and see who it was who said it and where) that “after the final no comes the yes.” For every “no” any of us might say, God has one more “yes.”

Peter said “No” a number of times, three times to be exact. “No, I don't know the man.” “No, I'm not one of his followers.” “Like I already told you, no, I do not know him!” But Jesus turns those “no's into “yes”es – “Yes, Lord, I will feed the sheep” ... “Yes, Lord, I will tend the lambs” ... “Yes, Lord, I will go where you lead, wherever you lead.”

Or take Saul (later Paul). Saul said “no” a whole bunch of times in all kinds of ways, until Jesus whacked him upside the head with a lightning bolt, striking him blind, giving him a chance to think things over.

Ananias said “no,” too. “No, Lord, I don't think this is a good idea.” “No, Lord, I don't think you want him ... I mean really! After all he's done: stoning Stephen the deacon, rounding up your followers to throw them into prison, haul them before the chief priests and elders ... and now you want me to do what?” “No, Lord, I really do not want to go help him.”

But yet, Ananias' “no” became “yes” and he went ... and he did as he was told ... and Saul, who said no, became Paul who said yes – yes to the gospel, yes to proclaiming the good news, yes to all kinds of sufferings and problems and trials that came with it.

So where is there a “no” in your life where a “yes” is needed? Let God speak that “yes;” let God speak that “yes” through you.

Where do you see people who are saying “no, no, no” when you know the answer God gives is “yes”? Go to those places. Speak that yes. Whenever and wherever we run out of “no's, God is there with the ultimate “yes.”

The worthy Lamb who takes the scroll to open its seals is Jesus, and Jesus is the message – his teaching and caring, his living and dying, his rising from death in the ultimate “yes” to life. This is what God wants done, what God has to say to the world: that the final word is yes, not no; that the final word is life, not death.