

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Second Sunday of Easter

April 24, 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!

1st Scripture Reading: Acts 5:12–32 (ESV):

Many Signs and Wonders Done

12 Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. 13 None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. 14 And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, 15 so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. 16 The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

The Apostles Arrested and Freed

17 But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy 18 they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. 19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, 20 "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life."

21 And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach. Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. 22 But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, 23 “We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside.” 24 Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. 25 And someone came and told them, “Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.” 26 Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. 27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, 28 saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. 30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

EPISTLE: Revelation 1:4–18 (ESV):

Greeting to the Seven Churches

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood 6 and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

Vision of the Son of Man

9 I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet 11 saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. 14 The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades."

Gospel: John 20:19–31 (ESV):

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

Jesus and Thomas

24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless

I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”

27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” **28** Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” **29** Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

The Purpose of This Book

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; **31** but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Sermon 14 – Second Sunday Of Easter

“Crucified Triumph”

Revelation 1:4-18

Dear friends in Christ,

Our Epistle lesson this Sunday comes from the book of Revelation, and as such there's strange things in here. As always though, there is a reason for this, and there is a reason this reading comes so soon on the heels of Easter. The scene that John so dramatically paints for us is a scene of triumph, power, control, and these things are awesome, and more to the point, they have great benefit for us.

The book of Revelation is bizarre but not nonsensical, it follows a certain set of rules, the problem is, the people that first read this would have easily recognized the rules and the style of the book. This is because it was written according to a certain style, it was an apocalyptic book. There were a bunch of these circulating back in the day. People ate this stuff up, they read it for fun, so they understood what was going on here even if we have to dig and scratch our heads a bit. A lot of these apocalyptic books survived, so we

can compare them and figure out what's going on, which is handy. I'm telling you all this to remind you that you don't read Revelation like you read the rest of the Bible. You have to come to the book on its own terms, and it sets the terms in the first sentence of the book. John explains what's going on as he introduces the book. He says: **“The apocalypse of Jesus Christ.”** Five words, but they tell you what Revelation is going to be. It's an apocalypse, so you have to do some work and get yourself in that mindset, and also, it's about Jesus Christ. Jesus is the point of the book, which is not really surprising, because it's in the Bible, and the Bible is all about Jesus, but Revelation is just so *weird* that it tends to distract us from that fact. This is all about Jesus.

God is obviously the one who gives John this vision, but as you can see in the first sentence of the Epistle, John is writing a letter to seven churches in Asia. He's doing this for a reason. The time period here was not being nice to Christians, the Roman Empire wasn't all that pleased with Christians at the time, the Jews were becoming increasingly aggressive as the churches grew larger and larger. So there's persecution going on, and because the church is so small and vulnerable, still in its infancy, people were scared. They were asking questions. What's going to happen to us? Where will we be tomorrow? Next year? Five years? Things did not look great. False teachers were popping up among the churches and confusing people, the first heretics. It was a confusing and very scary time to be Christian. You didn't know who to trust, you didn't know if the local government was going to tolerate you or not.

So John puts down this vision He has and writes it according to God's command, and after some initial introduction, this is what he leads off with. **“John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”** Now, this sounds kinda plain and it doesn't say anything, but John is reminding everyone that Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified, has not only done all this, given all this to us, but

remains God. When John says “to him be glory and dominion” he's not just saying how awesome God is, He's stating the obvious. God is in charge of all this nonsense, people. Jesus is the ruler of the kings on earth. Jesus loves us and frees us, and Jesus has dominion and glory.

To us this sounds just kinda duh, like, of course Jesus has all these things, but remember, this letter is addressed to people who felt threatened by kings. They felt out of control, all these guys with swords can do all these things to us and our families, and we can't fight them. We can't do anything about it. So John reminds these people, you are not subject to them, you are subject to Jesus. Jesus is the one that you answer to. Those rulers and kings will have to answer to Him. And Jesus loves you. Jesus died to redeem you. Jesus died and made you your own kingdom, the church is its own nation. Even as you have to suffer the Roman Empire Christians, you are members of a greater kingdom, one beyond the petty hatreds of men.

The rest of the letter is couched in this vein of reassurance. It is weird to find reassurance in how powerful and triumphant and mighty Jesus is, but that's what John is doing here. **“I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”** Restatement in the Bible seems totally pointless to us, but the Bible does it all the time, and it does it because this is a culture that learned by rote repetition. When the Bible repeats itself, picture a hammer pounding the point in. This is big, this is important, so important that I'm gonna say it over and over again. That's why you get this incredible description of Jesus at the end of the reading. That's Jesus in power, that's Jesus in charge, I know you're scared of these kings, but this Jesus, kings can't stop him.

John goes on. **“Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.”** Jesus' coming has always had this kinda double-meaning to it. John highlights some of the grimmer aspects of it here, that Jesus' coming will not be pleasant for those who do not believe in Him. They will see the God they have pierced with their sins, and that will not be nice. They will wail, he says. You don't use that verb when you're happy.

To churches who are getting pushed, persecuted, and killed by those around them, however, this is pure ambrosia. This is promised rescue from uncertain death. These Christians feel like hostages of the kings they're beholden to, they feel like they're tied up and on the floor and totally helpless to change their situation. They want Jesus to do this, they want Jesus to come back, to break into this world and rescue them from this horrible situation they've found themselves in. It's kind of hard to relate to for us, but this is a great bit of reassurance for them.

So, as always, what about us? Well, what you scared of, Bethel? The way the world has changed, so much so fast? The way the country seems to devolve, or the way that the church doesn't feel or look like it used to. Maybe you're like me, scared of the mistakes you made, that you had some kind of opportunity to do it right, and you missed it. Our situation and our sins can be frightening. You don't want to be the ones who let it down, let it go. What could you have done better? What did you do worse? It's not fun. I know, believe me.

This passage is for you too. It offers hope, but it's not the kind of hope you and I want. That's the thing about Jesus that can really stick in the craw, He never quite satisfies the itch, never quite goes the way you want Him to, even when He is genuinely helping you out. So John the Revelator sees Jesus, full of glory, and his response gives you that hope. **“When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, 'Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.’”** The churches back then were scared of dying too. John was so scared of it he likely passed out when Jesus appeared to him, or least had some kinda severe reaction. Jesus says it so clearly though, that He died and is alive forevermore, and He has the keys of Death and Hades. Life and death are in Jesus' hands, nobody else's. Not fate, not whimsy, certainly not our own. We live and die by Jesus' word and none other, and remember what Jesus said earlier, that He has freed us from our sins by His blood and made us a kingdom. A kingdom. Not just some tiny little outpost struggling for survival, but a kingdom. Jesus' kingdom. That's what

the church is, and that's what Christ has done for the church. We're in His hands, as we always have been, and powerful hands they are, loving hands they are.

Amen.