

Second Sunday of Easter

April 2, 2018

Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM

Revelation 1:4-18 John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, **5** and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, **6** and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

7 “Look, he is coming with the clouds,”
and “every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him”;
and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.”

So shall it be! 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.”

John’s Vision of Christ

9 I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. **10** On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, **11** which said: “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.”

12 I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, **13** and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. **14** The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. **15** His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. **16** In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. **18** I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

“Present for His People”

Let’s deal with the elephant in the room right away. Today is not Easter. Yet Christians emphasize the importance of Easter by moving our day for worship from Saturday, the Sabbath, to Sunday to commemorate each week the resurrection of Jesus. We dedicate an entire season of our calendar, today and the next 5 Sundays, to reinforcing the lasting consequences of what Easter means for us and for our world.

And yet, it sure doesn’t feel like Easter. Not as many people here. Not the amazing special music. We didn’t stuff our bellies with an exceptional Easter breakfast. The few of you who

dusted off your suits and suffered through the discomfort of wearing a tie are back to more normal attire.

The days after Easter can feel eerily like scenes out of the movie Home Alone. The family is prepared. Everything is ready. Counting heads. Yep, we've got everyone. But somehow eight-year-old Kevin is still at home. And he could fall prey to bumbling thugs who have been staking out the house.

Where is Jesus for us today? Everything looks right. The routine feels familiar. It seems like everything should be right. But something feels like it's missing. Where is our joy? Where is our boldness and confidence and sense that nothing can conquer our faith? Where is that invisibility we felt just a week ago?

By getting an introduction to the book of Revelation, we get to hear that we are never alone. And Jesus does more than come up with elaborate booby traps and ambushes to protect us from the non-comical evils we face. Jesus has an important message for us today: **"Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever!"** (Revelation 1:17,18) Jesus died, but lives to make hope alive. Jesus is still the living one. And because He lives, He can be present for His people.

I love it when Bible scholars and writers come up with catchy or poetic sounding subtitles for books of the Bible. I've seen some good ones for the Book of Revelation. But the best way to remember what the entire book is all about is that Jesus gets the win. There is some really interesting stuff, some very vivid prophecy, some confusing verses and symbolism. But we lose track of the main point of the book if we forget it is all about Jesus' victory. Jesus conquered by his death and resurrection. Jesus will come back to bring his ultimate and final victory to his people. We have one picture of that in the opening verses of Revelation: **"Look, he is coming with the clouds," and "every eye will see him, even those who pierced him"; and all peoples on earth "will mourn because of him." So shall it be! Amen.**" (Revelation 1:7) So with all the things that happen God's people, all the scary images and events contained in the book, Jesus wants us to remember he is in control. And because Jesus wins, his people are triumphant.

And we know that. We know from Revelation and from so many of Jesus' own parables how everything is going to end. We know God will get the glory. God's people will be victorious at the end of all things. But we live in the here and now. And it is an uncomfortable in between. We live in between Jesus first coming climaxing in his death and resurrection and his second coming in ultimate victory. It's the in between where we find all the conflicts.

The Apostle John gives us the setting for the book of Revelation: **"I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus."** (Revelation 1:9) He then goes on to tell us how God had everything mapped out and communicated it to Jesus and then Jesus shares it with the Apostle John and John writes it all down so he can share it with us. But did you catch the way John describes himself? John puts himself in the same boat when it comes to the suffering and the kingdom and the

endurance that we have in Jesus. And I don't think you would be alone if you heard that first thing he shares with us and lost track of the next two. The people who read John's words, the people immediately after the resurrection of Jesus all the way to the believers just hours before the return of Jesus will share in suffering that are our possession because of our connection to Jesus.

The first people who read Revelation faced some serious sufferings. The book was directed to the Christians in the earliest days of the faith. About 60 years after Easter, after all the apostles except John were already gone, after the first generation of believers had already passed on to glory, the people at the time of John were experiencing severe persecution. There had been one initial round of oppression under Emperor Nero and now things were going up to the next level under the Emperor Domitian. And that oppression came specifically because of their faith in the resurrected Jesus. So those experiences caused them to question everything.

John identifies with us because we share together in the suffering or distress or affliction. His choice of word has this picture of being pressed down and squeezed. And that wouldn't have to be an evil emperor or government unfriendly to Christians. Just the realities of life can start to squeeze in on you. It feels like bills are pushing down on you. Family troubles put the squeeze like you are being cranked down in a vice. Work responsibilities push and drama with people at work pull. And all of the sudden, it doesn't seem like Easter really makes much of a difference. Easter comes and goes and life still feels the same. I still have stress. I still have problem people in my life. I still can't get things going in the direction I want. I still struggle with the same weaknesses. And worst of all, so often I still feel so all alone.

And then Easter seems like any other holiday. Like President's Day or Valentine's Day. You change the decorations and put away the decor and you just go on with what comes next. Easter gets that treatment in our lives sometimes. It's done. It's over. We just move on.

And yet Christians know it is more than just a holiday, not just any old celebration. But it sure feels like something that happened a long time ago and doesn't change anything for us today. It's more like the signing of the Declaration of Independence or Memorial Day. Real events that were really meaningful. But they just don't impact our lives too much. We even become fearful about what's coming next for us. The unknown isn't clear. And we aren't sure we are ready for whatever comes next. Even if the conclusion of Revelation happens tomorrow and Jesus comes back in glory, we don't know how we should feel about it. Should we be scared? Do we have reason to be frightened? Have we done everything we can? Have we made all the preparations and done our best? Will that be enough?

Behind all our fears is a sliver of doubt. We doubt the reality of Jesus' resurrection. We doubt his ongoing presence in our lives. We doubt his impact on our existence. Behind every ounce of doubt is a disconnect from God's promises.

The happy ending for this home alone episode doesn't come from a wily kid who figures things out for himself, learns how to defend himself, and discovers how to outsmart

dimwitted crooks. The good news comes from a gentle reminder about who our God is. That's why the Apostle John begins this first chapter the way he does: **"John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne."** (Revelation 1:4) All the gifts of God's love come to us through Jesus Christ. All these blessings are ours as a result of what Jesus has done. Then he continues: **"and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth."** (Revelation 1:5) Jesus is God's prophet who brings us true knowledge of God. Jesus is God's priest who became our sacrifice and satisfaction by his death and resurrection. Now Jesus is our King. Jesus governs all other rulers and uses them to carry out his divine purposes.

But it doesn't end there. There is good news for people who feel defeated, abandoned, left to fend for ourselves. John offers this praise to Jesus: **"To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father."** (Revelation 1:5,6) No matter how you feel, Jesus loves you. No matter what you've done in ignorance or arrogance against God, Jesus released you from it. Jesus used his own blood to spring you from the bondage of guilt and the slavery of shame. Now you have an exalted place with God. You have the right of access and the ability to approach God. You can go directly to him with your concerns and on behalf of anyone else. That's because the resurrection of Jesus has fundamentally changed your relationship with God and your outlook on life.

You can probably remember a scary situation when you thought your parents left you in a grocery store. And then the relief when they came down your aisle to let you know you were never really alone. A few years back I had a scary situation when I woke up in a hospital in Mexico City. No, it wasn't because of too much tequila or an exotic virus. It probably had a lot more to do with the stress I was under serving as translator between my friend's American parents who speak no Spanish and his soon to be bride's parents who didn't speak English, while my friend took a trip to get his wife's visa and our other classmates decided to go to the beach. But you already can imagine how disorienting and confusing it could be to wake up semi-coherent in a hospital room with wires and tubes coming out of unexpected places. But when it's in another country and the people around you aren't speaking your native language, well, it's another level of bewildering. So when I awoke in the middle of the night to see my friend sitting across the room from me, the relief I felt was beyond explanation.

That's the way Jesus is here for you today. In the middle of your loneliness and abandonment anxiety, Jesus is there. When you are feeling squeezed by worry and doubt and stress, Jesus is there. When sadness and sickness and problem people press down on you, Jesus is with you. Jesus is the one John sees in Revelation chapter one in the middle of the lamp stands. Jesus is there for his people, the church. Jesus is there with his purity, there with his all-seeing eyes, there with his powerful voice. Jesus is there with his judgement and there with his power and there with his heart-changing Word.

So Jesus didn't just win when he suffered, died and rose on Easter Sunday. Jesus isn't just going to bring about ultimate victory when he returns at the end of the world. Jesus wins now. Jesus wins today. Jesus is with his people in power and victory. Jesus is here with you to give you his triumph in all your every day adversities. Jesus is present for his people. Amen.

+ Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. +