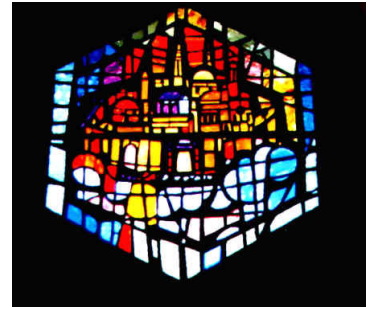


St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church-WELS
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
Easter 4 April 25, 2010 Revelation 7:9f



After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?" I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

People of God—rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

There was a funeral on Tuesday on the outskirts of Farmington. Up in front of Church there was a burnished silver urn—that contained the ashes of Meinhardt. Meinhardt F. Raabe—of late had lived down in Florida in a nursing home—but they had brought his ashes back to Farmington—to bury them next to his wife in the Immanuel Cemetery. I never met Meinhardt—I never shook his hand—but I know Uncle Terry did. Meinhardt was the Munchkin Coroner. If you ever watched *The Wizard of Oz* you know the famous words he sang—concerning the wicked witch of the East. "As coroner, I must aver, I thoroughly examined her. And she's not only merely dead, she's really most sincerely dead!" Meinhardt knew that Jesus was his Savior. Meinhardt—who was a member of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Farmington loved the stained glass window that shows Jesus—the Good Shepherd—who laid down his life for his sheep. Meinhardt knew that behind the beautiful wooden altar—the classic altar—with the great wooden spires—hidden behind that altar is a round window—a picture of a lamb. Meinhardt knew—*I am Jesus' little lamb*. And Meinhardt knew—Jesus is the Lamb of God—who takes away the sins of the world! That's all that matters. That's all that counts!

Salvation Belongs to the Lamb!

1. *We will come through great tribulation*
2. *God will wipe away every tear!*

The part of God's Word we are concentrating on—is part of the Revelation to St. John. For 6 Sundays after Easter—with Jesus' permission—the second reading is from Revelation. The Apostle John—the disciple that Jesus loved—was in exile on the island of Patmos. This was a time of persecution. When pastors and teachers and staff ministers go to college—we study Roman history. 64 years after Jesus was born—there was a terrible fire in the city of Rome. It's easy to imagine how the flames spread from one home to another. Someone must be blamed! Someone must be held accountable! The Emperor Nero blamed the Christians—these strange people who believed in a carpenter turned traveling preacher—who was executed—then supposedly raised to life again! Nero had Christians arrested and put to death. He had them crucified. He had them put to death by gladiators. He tied animal skins to them—and had them literally thrown to the lions. He even had this idea—you could put a shirt on them—soaked with something highly flammable—then set them on fire. They say Nero liked to do this at night—to literally made human street lights out of Christians! Jump ahead about 20 years and the Emperor is named Domitian. This is about the time John wrote Revelation—about the time of the

Emperor Domitian. It has been said – there are powerful politicians – who have a pretty inflated opinion of themselves. Domitian literally – point blank considered himself a god! For 15 years he encouraged people to call him “Lord and God”! Domitian’s rule over the Roman Empire came to a terrible end – when his niece’s butler was granted a private audience in his bedroom – supposedly to warn him about a deadly conspiracy. Instead – the butler stabbed the Emperor in a most painful way. The mortally wounded Emperor staggered to his bed – to retrieve the dagger he always had hidden under his pillow – he discovered the dagger was gone! It was with this historic background – the Roman Emperors persecuting the Church of Christ – that the Holy Spirit breathed into John – the seven letters to the seven Churches – the Revelation – the glimpse into Heaven that John saw!

Our reading for today begins with the words: “**After this I looked...**” After what? Chapter 7 says – **After this** – after chapter 6 – **I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the fore heads of the servants of our God.”** This is picture language – *figurative* language. The point is not that we have some literal mark on our foreheads – not some bar code – to label us children of God. We have that seal in our minds and in our hearts! Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000... You get the picture! The number of people in heaven is far more than 144,000! There are going on half a million people who are members of the Wisconsin Synod alive right now! The point is completeness! 12,000 is a number like 40 – 40 days and 40 nights – or the number 12 – like the Twelve Tribes of Israel or the Twelve Disciples or the Twelve months of the year or the 12 hours of day and the 12 hours of night. Ten is a good number and ten times ten times ten is a thousand times 12 is 12,000! It’s complete! Holiness – at it’s ultimate root meaning is *completeness* – nothing lacking – nothing missing – everything it’s supposed to be!

After this..after seeing all the people in Heaven – all the children of Abraham, Isaac, Israel – the people who believe the Gospel promises of God – that would be you and me. **After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb!** Every nation, tribe, people and language... these are all the things that try to separate people! How many nations are there? It depends on which list you look at. There are at least 222! People are dying – according to the CIA in – Swaziland, Angola, Lesotho and Sierra Leone, Zambia, Liberia, Mozambique and Afghanistan at the greatest rate in the whole world! Do you know where Swaziland is? It’s near the bottom of Africa – a little corner of South Africa. Their motto? *We are a fortress! We are a mystery/riddle! We hide our self away!* There are about 1 million people in Swaziland! I wonder how many know that Jesus died to take all their sins away? Am I supposed to care about Swaziland? Yes, I am! Do you know where Lesotho is? It’s not too far from Swaziland! There are about 2 million people in Lesotho. They, like the people of Swaziland are dying at a faster clip than almost anyone else in the whole world! Again – are they going to heaven? Do they know that Jesus died to take away all their sins? We are sharing the Gospel in Zambia and Afghanistan – that’s only two of the 8 top nations where people are dying faster than anywhere else on the planet! Again – is it because these people don’t need God’s Word! That can’t be right! Is it because there is no one willing to go? That can’t be right either! Can the only reason be – because we do not have the mission thank offerings to send someone? How can that be right?

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb! None of the things that separate people on earth – will ever separate people in Heaven. Nothing will separate us again. In the meantime – we can have a little sneak preview of Heaven – when by the power of the Gospel we do what we say at the end of the service – *and now brothers and sisters in Christ – by the power of the Gospel – go in peace – live in harmony with one another...* Do you stop and appreciate what that means? Live in harmony with one another. Jesus said on the night he was betrayed, “**A new commandment I give you – love one another. As I have**

loved you – so you must love one another. Everyone will know that you my disciples if you love one another!" Just the opposite happens whenever there is quarreling – arguing – factions and divisions--people picking sides for this one and against that one. To love one another is to put an end to gossiping. We show love for one another when we refuse to spread gossip – refuse to listen to gossip – refuse to say something evil about anyone – *even if it's true!* I was at a wake the other day in Fond du Lac – where I saw my friend Judy. I've mentioned her before. Judy never ever says anything bad about anyone! What a sweet fruit of faith – what the 8th Commandment really means. To defend your neighbor – to speak well of them – and to take their words and actions in the kindest possible light. To build up and encourage one another – will enhance the reputation of our Savior – the reputation of our Synod – the reputation of our Church – the reputation of our Seminary and College and Prep Schools and area Lutheran High Schools and our day school and Sunday School! Defend them. Speak well of them. Take their words and actions in the kindest possible light!

Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes – who are they, and where did they come from?" I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. I was watching a doctor show on TV the other night – when it said – most of the people who have Hodgkin's disease – are young people. Then it said – there's almost no money being spent on Hodgkin's disease research. Do you know what Hodgkin's Disease is? They showed a young girl in a hospital bed – wearing hospital jammies. She had no hair and she was very thin! She had a little plastic cup with which she was asking people walking by on the sidewalk – do you want to give a gift – to help find a cure for my disease? Everybody ignored here. Everybody just walked past here. No one stopped. No one helped. And I thought to myself – how cold? Then I thought – if only sin and unbelief made you look as pitiful on the outside as you are pitiful and doomed on the inside! Our world is full of people who are ravaged by sin – more and more on the inside! And when the inside is so hurt and harmed – sometimes there is painful evidence on the outside. But most of the time the hurt is to our heart and our soul. People in Heaven are those who have been washed through and through by the blood of the Lamb. We are cleansed by Jesus' innocent blood spilled on the cross to redeem us!

For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. I hurried to Immanuel Lutheran Church in Farmington on Tuesday morning. I got there a little late – but just in time for the start of the sermon. That was the part I wanted to hear more than anything. I knew Pastor Pagels would point everyone there to the comfort of the Easter Gospel. And he did. He talked about Meinhardt going to Northwestern College – about being a Munchkin, about driving the Oscar Meyer wiener mobile – and about being in the Civil Air Patrol – being able to reach the pedals and fly an air plane. All of that was very interesting. But the most important part was always and only about Jesus – the Good Shepherd! That's all that really matters – being safe in the arms of the Good Shepherd. The newspaper from Milwaukee had a reporter there. And sad to say – they got it wrong – the last line of print – the reason you need to read the whole thing. It said we sang, "Amazing Grace" in his memory and sent him off with the knowing comfort that he is "safe in the arms of the Lord." A place he earned! He didn't earn it! You can't! We will spend our eternity, too – safe in the arms of the Lord – by grace alone! That's what *Amazing Grace* is all about! That's what grace is – a gift of the goodness and mercy. It's sad they didn't get that last line right. Meinhardt was saved by grace alone. That's what Pastor Pagels said. That's what God's Word says! Pastor Pagels rapped the pulpit when he said "Amen!" I love that part, too! Amen!

To God alone all glory!

Rev. Anthony E. Schuttz