

Nightcrawlers Serenading a Little Lamb
(1May22) Revelation 5:11-14

Three cheers for more from Revelation! Maybe not hip-hip-hooray, but “holy, holy, holy!”

That triple cheer was raised in the previous chapter of Revelation by the four living creatures mentioned in our reading today, creatures described as having not just a human head but lion and ox and eagle heads, with six wings and covered with eyes. Around the throne day and night, their cheer echoes other strange six-winged throne-orbiters from Isaiah 6, and—though you may be surprised to keep such company—you echo this shared cheer “holy, holy, holy” in our liturgy when we get to communion.

More about that connection to come, but I’m getting a little ahead of myself.

Well, actually, Revelation itself gets far ahead, launching us to the vision of the final heavenly throne room.

But how can it be showing us the ending? We’d hardly started! Last week we had the letter’s “from” and “to,” the grace and peace of a greeting. The bare introduction. The following three chapters offer specific notes to each of the seven churches to whom the letter was addressed.

Then, all of a sudden, we’re whisked into the heavenly throne room. That’s the first thing of the vision! The quick transition is the kind of thing that makes Revelation full of surprises—and not spooky surprises, but good ones!

An example: at the end of chapter 3 Jesus says, “Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking, if you...open the door, I will come in to you.” Then chapter 4 immediately has John reporting, “After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open!” When it seemed to be a question whether we’d let Jesus in to our place, we abruptly find ourselves welcomed into his!

So the vision that is revealed or unveiled in Revelation begins around God’s throne with victorious singing. It’s surprising: songs of victory before anything has started! There’d been nothing so far to overcome, but already victory is celebrated.

I also enjoy a twist of who has the victory. John is told, “See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah...has conquered.” But John doesn’t see a conquering lion. What he sees is the lamb who was slain. Actually, not even lamb. It’s the diminutive version, like little lamby-wamby. Certainly not what we’d expect to conquer, and definitely not by dying. Revelation reverses even whose side we want to be on. If it’s the lamby-wamby who wins, we shouldn’t bet on our views of power or wealth or wisdom or might.

That also means that if you’re looking in Revelation for dragons and the moon turning to blood and torment in fiery pits (would you say that’s what you’re looking for?), they’re not the center of attention. Jesus Christ (the lamby-wamby who was slain) reveals and really wants you to know this ultimate ending. The vision will keep circling around to reinforce it for you—from last week’s start that Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, A-to-Z, on all the way to the grand conclusion in chapters 21 and 22, with a couple more scenes like today along the way. The victory belongs to God in Jesus. That’s the final celebration song, already on our lips.

Quite literally, we’re already singing it! Did you catch that echo? As Nancy read, the words had already reverberated this morning in our canticle of praise. Join with me if you recall: “Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us free to be people of God. Power, riches, wisdom, and strength, and honor, blessing, and glory are his. Sing with all the people of God, and join in the hymn of all creation: Blessing, honor, glory, and might be to God and the Lamb forever. Amen!” See, Revelation, is not so strange and scary, and you do know it by heart!

I love this rhythm of our liturgy, because it fits us into both the timeframe and into the bigger chorus. By singing already now this final victory song, we trust the ending. Revelation skips immediately to the ending, and we just keep on singing. When we happen to join this song on a Sunday morning, we walk through the door Jesus opened for us to see where this is all headed.

That’s the frame in time, and then there’s the bigger chorus. We’re joining in the hymn of all

creation! John heard “every creature in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and in the sea” singing! As we pick up the tune on a Sunday morning, we’re belatedly catching up on what the rest of creation knows! “All God’s critters got a place in the choir: some sing low and some sing higher.” It’s not just lofty angels accompanied by myriads of saints, but may be the birdsong we are hearing or a dog’s bark or, as it was pointed out in Bible study this week, even the mouths of worms open wide joining this song! “Every creature!”

I don’t quite want to make this sound like a one-big-happy-family campfire singalong. The final victory song is also a prelude to the next chapter, which trots out of the infamous four horsemen of Revelation, or of the Apocalypse. My professor I cited last week, again, points out* that the riders come in a certain order of affecting us.

The first, armed with a bow to conquer, is generally our furthest concern, representing a foreign army; though we watch this horseman unleashed on Ukraine, it’s still fairly far from us.

The second horseman’s sword is said to be when people “slaughter one another,” and may be the closer proximity now of gun violence or police killing Black citizens or other ways we hurt each other.

The third bears scales of economic imbalance, maybe recognized in widespread fears from inflation or more directly realized that Elon Musk could blow \$44 billion on a vanity project while others can’t afford to eat or pay rent.

The final horseman is death, who partially described as bearing disease, hitting awfully close to home in inescapable pandemic, and we all know finally we’re unable to evade that last horseman.

Except the vision says you already have! However close those fearful riders come, and when they attack, still you’ve already seen yourself singing to the lamby-wamby who was slain, and whose death has conquered death itself.

So we say to death: you feebly strive to haunt us, O death, but we know how this really ends, so you might as well line up in this big ol’ chorus line and sing along with us and the worms and join in

the hymn of all creation: Blessing, honor, glory, and might be to God and the Lamb forever. Amen!

* Craig Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* p82-87