

Supplemental Epistle Lesson: Revelation 16:1-10

19:1 After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, ² for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants." ³ And again they shouted: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." ⁴ The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: "Amen, Hallelujah!" ⁵ Then a voice came from the throne, saying: "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!" ⁶ Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. ⁷ Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. ⁸ Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) ⁹ Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God." ¹⁰ At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." – NIV84

Prayer of the Day:

Almighty God and Savior, you have set the final day and hour when we shall be delivered from this world of sin and death. Keep us ever watchful for the coming of your Son that we may sit with him and all your holy ones at the marriage feast in heaven; through Jesus Christ, your son, our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. They are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple. Alleluia. (Rev. 7:15a)

Sermon Text:

Victory! That is a monumental word isn't it? I immediately think of VE-Day and the images that we see of people celebrating in the streets around the world because the tide of World War II had turned and Europe had finally been liberated from Nazi Germany's bloody assaults. Far less heroic, I think of Superbowl champions and the blankets of confetti that fall in the celebration that ensues or that deep breath of achievement as someone finally attains the goal they have yearned for, worked for, for so very long.

I have to say that I don't know that any of those feelings are the way I would describe 2020 for our congregation, our state, or our world. We have been plagued by pandemic now since March. Life has felt anything but victorious and as a result I don't think it has always brought out the best in people. We see it all over the news: tempers flare, molehills become mountains, we have torn apart cities and drawn battle lines against our neighbors on a plethora of issues. Emotionally, mentally, physically this has been a very difficult time. So we come to the Third Sunday of End Times, Saints Triumphant, saints victorious but perhaps we aren't feeling so very victorious today. That's one of the reasons I decided to focus on the words of Revelation chapter 16, because if its wonderful reminder that regardless of the state of the world around us God's enemies are defeated

and it will never be different. The other addresses our lives today as John sees us ready for the wedding banquet and living in joyful anticipation of that day. So today, though it may not feel like it, we can join with the heavenly throng and cry out **HALLELUJAH!** (Praise God) **VICTORY IS OURS!!**

Listen again to the first four verses of our lesson. ^{19:1} *After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, ² for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.” ³ And again they shouted: “Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.” ⁴ The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: “Amen, Hallelujah!”*

Revelation is one of those books where you need to think for a second to really understand what’s going on. It’s important that we understand who the great prostitute is here. Recall that in the lesson God’s true church stands as a bride beautifully adorned for Christ. This is also the language Paul uses in Ephesians 5. So it doesn’t require much of an imagination to figure out who one who committed adultery with every other power on the planet would be. This is the false church, it is false teaching, which in the chapter previous even would ally itself not with God’s truth but with the power of fallen and sinful government which would persecute the church (the beast of the sea with its seven heads and ten horns). This is not 2020, or at least not only 2020. It’s Pharaoh and Herod slaughtering babies to preserve their power, it’s Kings and Pharisees and Sadducees who taught a Word different than the one God had given. It’s Rome’s sacrifice of Christians and the terrible twisting of truth which has been going on for quite some time in our own world. Most notably that which is occurring inside the halls of the church. We have for centuries called it heresy, false doctrine, false teaching. Ultimately, it is sin and Satan working mightily to separate the believer from the God who loves them and gives Himself for them.

But the picture is not of the atrocities, this harlot has committed upon the Church. Rather, it is of our God who is setting everything right. *God has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.” ³ And again they shouted: “Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.”* Ultimately this occurs on the last day, when God takes His people, you and me to the eternal glories of heaven and the enemy is seen as it really is, a complete loser for having opposed God and His holy Word. But it reminds us of the truth which so often is difficult to see in a sin-filled world. Sin and its consequences will not win! The end has already been determined and they will lose! God’s people will stand victorious, shouting out their Halleluiahs, literally their Praise God’s for all eternity. In a world where any truth is quickly countered this one stands forever. God’s Enemies are destroyed! *Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments.* And one day not only the church of all time (the 24 elders), but even the world around it (the 4 living creatures) will bow down acknowledging it.

But this is not the end of the picture given to John. While the smoke rises up from the corpse of false teaching, we hear the roar of the crowd once more. ⁵ *Then a voice came from the throne, saying: “Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!” ⁶ Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: “Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. ⁷ Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. ⁸ Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.”* (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the

saints.) ⁹ Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" "

It's a favorite picture of mine of the last day: The wedding day of the Lamb and His bride, of Christ and His Church. It's a picture that quarantines and lockdowns have only made all the brighter. All the believing world gathered together as one, singing and rejoicing. It's that victory celebration we so long for, hope for, yearn for.

Oh, and then there is something that grabs my attention. Notice that the bride has made herself ready for this. She has been anticipating this day and making preparation as we spoke of last week. She has done so by adorning herself in the fine linens given to her to wear. This is important for they are the righteous acts of the saints. This is the church militant, the church of our day which lives in the constant hope of the triumph to come, lives ever with Christ and His cross in view, given the righteousness which it seeks in the robes of Christ, washed at the cross in His blood and adorned with the gems and jewels of His perfection. It is only His work which makes ours shine bright and clean.

And then, and then the angel instructs John to write something down. We write things down because we might forget them, because they are unchanging truths handed from one age to the next and what is it? '*Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!*' Ah, a needed reminder in a day and age when I would often like to hang my head in despair and weep in the ashes of what once was and all that I long to be. I am blessed because the invitation is in hand, emblazoned on my head and on my heart in Holy Baptism, traced in the truths of God's unchanging words, emboldened in the reception of the Supper which is itself a foretaste of this great day made mine in the forgiveness purchased and won by Christ. And, as Luther once said, where there is forgiveness there is life (the strength to live in the joys and sorrows of each day knowing we have a purpose that transcends the achievements of the world around us) and salvation (that we might live in the eternal hope of eternally bright futures in the glory of heaven).

Victory is a monumental word. Our world's victories will always tarnish over time. Peace won with a weapon will eventually give way to war once more. Trophies won and rejoiced over in youth eventually gather dust in boxes forgotten even by the historians. Health will always succumb to the ravages of time. But today, God writes it down, announces it in the roars of the church eternal, reminds us to live in its light even when the darkness of our world grows thick. In these days of uncertainty and fear, God's gives us real truth, lasting hope and a future worth preparing for. **HALLELUJAH! VICTORY IS OURS!!** God's enemies are already defeated. Dear friends may we live in this victory He has given until we stand in its realities forever in the Church Triumphant, eternal, victorious! Amen!