

St. Peter Lutheran Church, Doss, TX 5-1-22 “When I’m on My Journey”

Revelation 7:9 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. 10 And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, Who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." 11 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, 12 saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" 13 Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes--who are they, and where did they come from?" 14 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. 15 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. 16 Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. 17 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." Who are all the people?

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 – Are they not the ones Jesus refers to in His sermon on the mount when He says, (Matthew 5: 10) Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is

your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Does this mean unless I die for Him, I won't be around the throne? No. Not all are martyred for the faith. However, all the apostles, but John were martyred. John the Apostle died in exile on the island of Patmos. In those early years, many disciples were murdered for their faith. Being willing to die for what is right, or being willing to let your reputation die for what is right, or letting your own desires die in order to be more faithful – all have an element of dying about them.

It is what Jesus spoke to when he said, “Deny your self. Take up your cross and follow Me.” And why can He say this? He said in today's Gospel, (John 10: 27) *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of My Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one.* That says that He is God.

What is the effect of the resurrection? Is it not a promise and an invitation to be with God forever? What does the resurrection mean to you? (Take a moment and write four different reasons you look forward to heaven. Make some notes on your bulletin. Let's take a second and do that.)

What does the resurrection mean to me?

1) I will be with Jesus Whom I love; 2) I will be with family and friends who love Him too 3) I will be with Christians I respect, who have inspired me

a) Writers of God's Word b) Song writers and performers c) Christian leaders such as Martin Luther or Abraham Lincoln

4) I will no longer be sad.

What does your list look like? You won't have to turn them in or speak them aloud. I would just ask that you share what you wrote with your family.

The resurrection life in heaven is also a mystery to me. When you hear about four living creatures, eternal praise, people gathered around God who have died for him, being shepherded by Christ, having living water – I don't have a parallel experience like that on earth. But my task now is to serve Him – out of love not for something like a good feeling or experience or else the worship is not all His.

Most of us have not been persecuted. Most of us don't go looking for rejection or criticism. Luther certainly didn't. He just did what he knew to be right from God's Word. He said, "My conscience is captive to the Word of God." He was not only persecuted, his books burned, and a price on his head. He couldn't even go and meet with his persecutors. He had to send emissaries.

I read a remarkable devotional related to being blessed for being persecuted. The author wrote: "I have a friend who served as a fighter pilot during the Viet Nam war. I will always remember him telling me, 'You know you're flying over the right target when you're being shot at.' That statement reminds me of one way we can know we're living the Christian life the way it's supposed to be lived-persecution. When we live for Christ, we will be targeted-maybe less in a small town – maybe not.

Generally, being a Christian is acceptable in our culture. But that acceptability ends when our faith actually impacts how we live and talk. It's hard to think of being insulted and mistreated as being a blessing, but Jesus tells us not to despair because suffering for Him puts us in good company. His company includes all the prophets who have gone before. Jesus was completely innocent of any wrong doing, yet persecuted to the point of a humiliating, agonizing death on the cross on our behalf. We are not entitled to His gift of salvation. It is a gift - a gift to be used and not hoarded. Nobody enjoys being ridiculed, mocked or abused. But when that happens as a result of our stand for Jesus Christ, we know we're on target.

Diedrich Bonhoeffer said, “Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.” We don’t suddenly become Christians when we go to church and then take it off at the door when we leave or get home. If we do that, we are not sold out to Jesus Christ. If we are not sold out to Jesus Christ, then there is something more important than Him. It may be our self, our comfort, our security – whatever we value more than Him. Then we break the first commandment and the first of the great commandments. Then you have another god before you. Then you do not love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. You might like Him, respect Him, but so did the prosperous young ruler who came up to Him and asked what he needed to do to inherit eternal life and then went away sorrowful.

So where do you go from here? We don’t know what’s around the bend, but only that God is with us. Think of all those people in the Ukraine a few months ago. They didn’t know what was coming. But then the war came.

Where does one start? We start by knowing where we are in our relationship with God. Someone once said, “If you don’t know where you are starting from, how can you get to where you are planning to go?” Your personal prayers asking God to show you, reading scripture every day, even reading something like Purpose Driven Life – these are just some of the ways you can discover where you are starting from.

What’s the next step? On a trip, you make plans. So, what are your plans to journey closer to God? What do you take with you: the 6 marks of discipleship? Do you remember what those were? (Prayer, Worship, Scripture, Serving, Encouraging Tithing) Do you have a willingness to work together for the Kingdom of God?

To go on this journey will mean looking at your values in a new way. What is the destination? We have John’s vision in our text and second lesson for today. It shows us our final destination. Once, we get there, it is forever. If you are sold out for Jesus, which means He is your Savior, you will be there, gathered around the throne. Amen