

**+ Revelation 7:9-17 + “Jesus Lives” Means Safety + 4th Sunday of Easter + 21 April 2013 +**

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Is anywhere safe anymore? Recent events have reminded us how unsafe and dangerous our world is—terrorism on the streets of Boston, an industrial accident leveling a community in Texas, devastating earthquakes in Iran and China, poisoned mail in Washington D.C., floods in the Midwest, not to mention school shootings, superstorms, economic uncertainty, and awful crimes against young and old alike. All of that leaves us feeling unsafe and helpless, wondering “What’ll happen next?” In the past few days and weeks and months, we have seen how sinfully dark human hearts are and how completely sin has corrupted our world.

So is anywhere safe anymore? I suppose a concrete and titanium bunker buried deep underground or some kind of impenetrable mountain fortress would be quite safe, but such places are neither available nor practical. A cordon of well-armed military and police around you would keep you safe, but they’re just human beings. What about your home or even here at church? Even these places are susceptible to disaster or accident. When I was a little boy, the safest place for me was on the lap of my 6’5”, 350 lb. father. No one could hurt me there. No monster could get me, but as I grew up I learned that even my father is a mortal human being too.

Is anywhere safe anymore? The question begs to be asked as we find ourselves at the end of a very difficult week, but this morning Jesus gives us a glimpse of a place where we will never be unsafe or helpless or vulnerable. In doing so, the Good Shepherd calms his troubled sheep and reminds us that **“JESUS LIVES” MEANS SAFETY.**

So what is this place? The apostle John serves as our Shepherd-appointed tour guide to show us why no other place will ever be safer. The first thing you notice is that it’s **a place of peace instead of conflict.** John tells us, **“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.”**

Looking out over the multitude, you see so many people you could never count them all. You see people there like you and me and very different from you and me. You see people there from every generation going back to our first parents Adam and Eve. You see every one of your loved ones who died in the Lord and every other believer in Christ who ever lived. You see people there from every nation and tribe, yet there is no conflict, no competition, no inbred hatred or dislike because someone is different. There is no fear of danger or violence or attack. No, there’s only perfect peace as the countless throngs gather for the same purpose.

Then you hear it. You hear every language under the sun, but it isn’t the chaotic babble heard at the ancient, unfinished Tower of Babel when God foiled the arrogant pride of sinful humanity and confused their languages. No, what you hear is one, united joyous symphony of praise bursting forth with one, united voice from this endless sea of humanity dressed in white with waves of green palm branches in the air. **“Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”**

**“The Lamb”** is why we’re here. The Lamb of God sitting on the throne is the sole reason why that multitude is gathered together. The Lamb of God is the only reason any of those souls are even here. The Lamb of God is the focus of their praise, the focus of their worship, the focus of their eternity, because that Lamb sitting on the throne is their peace.

Sin had so completely corrupted us all that eternal condemnation in hell was the only rightful judgment the holy God could give, but the Lamb of God left his heavenly throne to put himself in our place. He came to be the required sacrifice, the required payment for the sins of the whole world. John the Baptizer proclaimed it when Jesus’ ministry first started. **“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”** (John 1:29)

That meant Jesus came to this world so his own blood would be shed, so he himself would suffer death, so he would reconcile a sinful world to its holy God. That’s exactly what he did for you and me and all those countless others gathered around his throne. That Lamb of God has been slain, but now he lives, and his holy, precious blood **“purifies us from all sin.”** (1 John 1:7)

That’s made all the more clear when one of the elders on our tour asks the apostle, **“These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?”** John answers, **“Sir, you know.”** So the elder explains, **“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.”**

The reason all those people are gathered together in peace is not because the nations finally set aside their differences and achieved world peace. No, they are in that place of perfect peace because Christ restored peace between them and the holy God. They live in peace because the Lamb of God gave his life in their place and his blood has made them holy before God. They praise in peace because he brought them through the **“great**

**tribulation**" of this world—this life during which Satan marshals all his evil forces to defeat and destroy God's people. They praise in peace because the blood of the Lamb has cleansed them of all their sin and its effects.

That's why that place is a place of peace instead of conflict. With the removal of sin, there is no more conflict, no more hatred, no more racism, no more class warfare, no more vengeance, no more blame, no more arrogance. Reconciled with God that great multitude praises the Lamb because of what he did for them rather than what they did for themselves, and then they serve him. Gladly and gratefully they spend their eternity serving him day and night in his temple.

Now if anything this past week has shown us, it's the reminder of how mortal, how vulnerable, how helpless we really are. No matter how much security is in place, no matter how many safety regulations are enacted, no matter how prepared we think we are, evil still reveals its ugly face and always behind it looms the terrifying shadow of death, and they never seem to stop.

None of us wants to admit it, but deep down inside we know how evil sin can be. There's nowhere in this world to which we can escape from that reality, but that place of peace we saw is also **a place of safety instead of vulnerability**. Listen as the elder describes the safety of that place. **"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."**

Since we live in a world filled with fear and evil, how comforting to know that you and I will one day live in a place where **"he who sits on the throne will spread his tent"** over us! The Lord of life, who has already defeated sin, death, and the devil, will surround you with his protection. You will be safe in his almighty, protecting care. Neither the sun nor scorching heat nor freezing cold nor rising floodwaters nor devastating earthquakes will harm you. Not even Satan himself will be able to harm you.

In that place, the living Lord will provide for you with his bountiful care. You won't have to fear the pangs of hunger or thirst or the pain of anything else that harms your body, because the living Lamb of God sitting on the throne will also be your shepherd. The picture of peace changes into a picture of safety as the Good Shepherd guides his troubled sheep **"to springs of living water"**. No safer place can be found than in the loving care of the Good Shepherd as he gives you the water of life so that nevermore will you thirst. Nevermore will you be afraid. Nevermore will you feel helpless and vulnerable. Nevermore will you wonder, "What's going to happen next?"

Nevermore will you grieve for those who suffer at the hands of terrorists or for those who lose their lives in an accident or natural disaster. Nevermore will you grieve for loved ones whose lives were taken by that great enemy called Death or over the reality of your own death. Nevermore will you grieve over the awful effects of sin in your life and in the lives of others. Nevermore will you grieve because this world is rushing headlong towards destruction on the Last Day. Nevermore will you grieve because in that place of perfect peace and safety, in the care of your living Shepherd, you will find joy. That place will be **a place of joy instead of grief**, because God has promised **"to wipe away every tear from your eyes."**

It's no wonder that in such a place the nations gather to sing praises to their living Lord and Savior. **"Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"** It's no wonder the multitudes praise their victorious Lord, because in his mercy he brought them to that place of eternal peace and safety and joy, that place where we in Christ long to be and where by God's grace we will be someday, that place we call heaven.

With everything going on that leaves us feeling so fearful and helpless, you and I yearn to be in that heavenly place. Someday we'll see that place in all its glorious fullness, but we're still here in this unsafe, frightening world. So what do we do? Simply yearn for heaven? Yes, we will do that, yet there is a place where we can find true peace and joy and safety even now.

Take a look at any picture of the Good Shepherd and you'll see that place, because in nearly every one of those pictures you see a lamb held close to the Shepherd's heart. There is no safer, more peaceful, more joyful place in this life than in the arms of your living, loving Shepherd, even if terrorists strike or accidents and disasters destroy or economies collapse or illness takes your health and death takes your physical life. In the almighty arms of your living, loving Shepherd Jesus, you're safe. That's where you are now and that's where you'll be someday in heaven. Jesus lives! Amen.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!