

Scripture Readings and Sermon

May 8, 2022 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Revelation 7:9-17

This reading from Revelation occurs after the Lamb has broken the sixth seal and before the seventh seal. The first six seals have brought the four horsemen as well as great natural disasters. There is then a pause so that the servants of God from the twelve tribes of Israel on earth can be marked on the forehead - twelve thousand from each of the tribes. The scene then returns to heaven with the reading today. The multitudes are once again praising the "worthy" lamb with the seven fold blessing in verse 12. When asked where the robed people came from, the response is that they "have come out of the great ordeal". At this point scholars disagree as to whether the robed ones were raptured during the ordeal and are thus living or if they died during the ordeal and are now alive in heaven. What is clear is that they will avoid the battle with the Beast and Satan because they are already enjoying the promise of God's presence in verses 16-17 which parallel 21:3-4. One of the greatest of promises is that God will remove the tears. This is an incredibly intimate gesture by the Master of creation.

Revelation 7: 15-17 "the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them...for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd"

Where or in whom do we seek our help?

Do we think that shelter means to avoid ordeals?

What does it mean that those who survived the "great ordeal" find shelter in the God?

If we shelter ourselves from all ordeals, are we really living?

Is the Lamb your shepherd even in the valley of the shadow of death?

Commentary on John 10:22-30

Chapter 10 of John is placed between the healing of the blind man at the pool of Siloam and the raising of Lazarus. While the story of the healing of the blind man in Chapter 9 focuses on sight, the "Good Shepherd" teaching of Chapter 10 focuses on hearing. At the end of John 10 beginning with verse 29, the focus shifts from Jesus as the Good Shepherd to Jesus' divinity with the Father. This shift sets up the story of Lazarus and the later conflict with Jewish authorities. The motif of hearing begins at 10:3 and ends with 10:27. The earlier verses were included to contrast the authorities saying "Why listen to him" (20) with "My sheep hear my voice" (27). For John, hearing and seeing are not simply bodily senses but indicate our spiritual sensitivity to the presence of God in our lives. The people did not know if Jesus was the Messiah because they neither had eyes to see nor ears to hear. Those that spent time listening and looking for God in prayer were the ones who could hear the Shepherd's voice.

John 10:27 My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.

When was the last time you heard Jesus' voice?

When was the last time you spent time listening for Jesus' voice?

What do you spend time listening to?

Do you sometimes feel like the Grinch surrounded by "noise, noise, noise"?

What do you need to stop listening to in order to start listening for Jesus?

Commentary on Acts 9:36-43

After the story of Paul's conversion, Paul became the number one threat to Jewish opposition to the early church. Facing a death threat in Damascus, Paul went to Jerusalem only to face suspicion from believers and more death threats. After Paul flees home to Tarsus, the story shifts the focus back

to Peter and the expanding church. Acts will focus on Peter until Paul begins his ministry in Chapter 13. Peter's ministry follows that of Jesus. After proclaiming repentance and the good news, Peter begins to do a number of healings building up to the resurrection of Tabitha just as Jesus raised the Rabbi's daughter. The story then moves to Peter anointing with the Holy Spirit and ultimately becoming the primary force behind including Gentiles into the early church. Tradition says that Peter was crucified upside down in Rome by Nero around 60 A.D.

Acts 9:40 Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, get up."

What do you think they expected when they called Peter?

What do you think Peter was expecting when he saw Tabitha?

Why do you think the first thing Peter did was silence the room and pray?

When faced with a problem do we immediately try to solve it or do we make room for God?

Given Peter's history, what is more surprising Tabitha's healing or Peter's prayer?

Reflection on Revelation 7:9-17, John 10:22-30, Acts 9:36-43

Sermon "Are You Listening"

What does it mean to be the sheep of the Good Shepherd and a disciple of the Good Shepherd. As sheep, John tells us that the sheep know the Shepherd's voice and that the sheep shall never be taken from the Shepherd. In Revelation, John tells us that the Lamb is the Good Shepherd and all those who have died believing in the Lamb will be protected by the Shepherd from the Beast and Satan. Note that the sheep are not saved from the "great ordeal" or death but rather they are saved from the ultimate separation from God's love - hell. Nothing, not even death, can take the sheep out of the Shepherd's loving grasp.

Last week, Peter was asked three times if he would love the Good Shepherd's flock. Jesus' response to Peter's conditional answer was that, to truly love the flock, Peter must go where he may not want to go. In Acts, Peter is called to Lydda when a member of the flock dies. Peter makes no promises but simply goes and at first listens. He listens to the widows who show him what Tabitha made when she was alive. He probably hears stories of her charity and kindness. And then Peter does what was hard for the disciples to learn when Jesus was alive - he prays. To be a follower of the Good Shepherd, Peter is called to listen both to the sheep and to the Shepherd. The first act of compassion is to listen. Following God's voice in prayer, Peter tells Tabitha to sit up. It is not by Peter's will but Peter's obedience to the Father's will that Tabitha was brought back from death. Stories of Tabitha and Lazarus are difficult because they are the rare exceptions. They are not brought back to life because they are special or more beloved but because their renewed life helped others to believe. Jesus, however, says to beware of signs because even Satan can do apparent 'miracles'. Faith is not based on miracles but on the love felt in the heart when the Shepherd calls our name. It is based on that comforting feeling of God's presence even when the world seems to be collapsing. The church in acts grew not simply the result of people repenting because of the "fear of the Lord" but also because of the "comfort of the Holy Spirit" that relieved all our fears. That comforting grace gives us the assurance that nothing will ever take us out of the Shepherd's loving grasp.