

Visions of What Will Be

Reverend Kate Zaiser (she/her) | Nazareth Lutheran Church | Standard, AB
Revelation 7:9-17 | All Saints Day | November 1, 2026

*Grace to you and peace from him
who is and who was and who is to come
(Revelation 1:4).*

Our first reading today is a high point in the visions that John of Patmos records in the Revelation to John. A multitude that no one can count surrounds God's throne and Christ the Lamb who was slain, singing their praises for the Lamb's victory over death and the forces that defy God. You might be able to picture your self joining in. Many of the songs in Revelation are used in our liturgy, after all.

From today's reading you might recognize "Salvation belongs to our God and to Christ the Lamb forever and ever," from the canticle of thanksgiving in the Service of the Word.

The second option for the canticle of praise in most of our communion liturgies draws from the angels' song in chapter 5:

*Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us free to be people of God.
Power, riches, wisdom, and strength, and honour, blessing, and glory are his.
Blessing, honour, glory and might be to God and the Lamb forever. Amen. (12-13)*

And in the very first scene of John's visions, four living creatures surround the throne of God and sing without ceasing, *holy, holy, holy, God of power and might...* (4:8), as we sing in the Great Thanksgiving. These high points in our liturgy celebrate Christ's victory over death through his death and resurrection.

However, alongside these highs in Revelation, where the heavenly host and a multitude of saints robed in white worship God, there are also many very difficult parts. The elder in our reading references this when he says, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal" (7:14). Just before this scene, in chapter 6, John sees four mounted horses—the four horsemen of the apocalypse--representing different types of destruction: conquest, war, famine, and death. They are followed by a vision of martyrs, believers who were killed because of their faith, who cry out "How long, Lord?" Finally, the day of the Lord arrives with earthquakes, darkness, and falling stars, and someone asks, "Who can stand?"

Who can stand, indeed? This may not be The Great Ordeal, but there is real suffering in our time, even in a peaceful and prosperous country like Canada. Think of the fires that have impacted so many Canadians in recent years: The fire at CBF Wainwright last month that killed four Canadian forces members and left dozens injured, many of whom are still in hospital, the fast-moving Bald Range wildfire near Summerland, BC in August, and many

other wildfires in BC, northwestern Ontario, and the Northwest Territories just this year. My own community was shaken by a workplace fire last month. One man is still recovering in hospital. Even if your community was not directly affected by fires, you've probably had wildfire smoke affecting the air quality at some point in the last couple of years.

And it's not only fires and other disasters that cause suffering in our world. There's violence, poverty, loneliness, disease, whether a gradual decline or an aggressive cancer, and death itself. Who can stand in the face of all that?

In response to that question, John hears an announcement of the number of those who will be sheltered from the ordeal: one hundred forty-four thousand, twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes of Israel. However, here and in other parts of Revelation, what he witnesses is not the same as what is spoken. He sees "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne" worshipping God (9). An elder explains to John, "These are they who have come through the great ordeal" (14) and they are worshiping around the throne because

*The one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.
They will hunger no more and thirst no more;
the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat,
for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of the water of life,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes (15b-17).*

Revelation 7 gives us one vision of what will be. In the second reading today, from 1 John 3, we are reminded that we don't know for certain what will be, but we do know that there is more to come, and that we are called children of God because we are already God's children. Later in Revelation there are other images of what will be in the new age, like heaven coming to earth, the river of the water of life flowing through the city, and the tree of life growing over the river with leaves for the healing of the nations.

There's one line that jumps out at me in today's reading. The same line is repeated in the final chapters of Revelation, filled with promise of what will be, and what will be no more. The line also came up a few weeks ago in a reading from Isaiah: "God will wipe every tear from their eyes" (Rev. 7:17, see also Rev. 21:4 and Isaiah 25:8).

That promise, that one day God will wipe away every tear, fills me with both joy and sadness every time I hear it. Usually, reading it feels like a deep sigh into God's loving embrace. When I was going through a miscarriage it made me bawl uncontrollably when someone used it as a devotional reading on a Zoom call.

Those words hold so much. That there are tears is an acknowledgement that things are not as they should be. There is suffering; there is loss; there is death. God knows it, and God is

present with us through the pain, not trying to cheer us up with platitudes or rushing through the discomfort. It's such an intimate gesture. Wiping away every tear means paying attention to each and every tear. The motion is tender.

Maybe a different line from the elder's speech stands out to you: shelter from the elements, no more hunger or thirst, being shepherded to the waters of life. Whatever it is that means the most, the elder gives a three-fold description of what God and the Lamb will do for the multitude: shelter them, be their shepherd, and comfort them. This is why "they are before the throne of God and worship him day and night," he says (14-17).

This is why we, too, find ourselves part of that multitude praising God. We join that multitude that no one can count because we can trust God and Christ the Lamb, singing, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb!" and,

*Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom
and thanksgiving and honour
and power and might
be to our God forever and ever! Amen.*

Even now, in a suffering world, and in the midst of our own suffering, through fire and flood, disaster, destruction, disease and death, when we do not yet know what will be, we can feel with all our sense the trustworthiness of the promise that God and Christ the Lamb will shelter us, be our shepherd, and wipe every tear from our eyes.

We **see** what love the Father has given us, and we **hear** God call us his children in the waters of baptism.

We **feel** the embrace of the one who wipes away every tear from each face in the sign of peace we share with one another.

We **hear** ourselves join with the choirs of angels, with the saints from all times and all places, especially those saints that we miss the most, and the hosts of heaven singing, *Holy, holy, holy, God of power and might*, as we prepare to **taste** and **see** that the Lord is good in that foretaste of the feast to come.

And when, at the end of the service, the candles are extinguished, we **smell** the smoke and know that God and the Lamb are still with us, even when the lights are out, the rafters silent, the water droplets dry, and the table cleared.

*Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom
and thanksgiving and honour
and power and might
be to our God forever and ever! Amen.*