

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
 "Revelation: the scroll and the lamb"

Scripture: John 1:29-31, Revelation 5:1-14

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Opener: All Creatures of Our God and King #433

Choruses: Agnus Dei & This is amazing grace (Phil Wickham)

Communion: Lamb of God (Twila Paris)

Closer: "Glory be to God the Father" #298

Communion Sunday

Have you ever been surprised to discover a different side
 of someone you thought you knew well?

The soldier who writes poetry.

The unassuming church lady

Who turns out to be a bold social activist.

The business owner who once laboured deep underground in the mines.

The doctor who spends weekends restoring muscle cars.

You've probably heard that the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky,
 was formerly a comedian and actor.

While he had studied law at University,

His real passion was theatre and improv.

You probably don't know that before entering the priesthood,
 Pope Francis had worked as a bouncer in a Buenos Aires nightclub,
 And then later went on to study chemistry.

Very few people are one-dimensional.

Most people will surprise us with their unexpected interests,
 Skills and experiences.

So we can be surprised by each other,
 what makes us think we've got God all figured out?
 If you think you know all there is to know about God
 You probably haven't spent much time reading Scripture

And you probably haven't studied the book of Revelation.
 Revelation does a good job of blowing away
 one-dimensional, monochromatic stereotypes of God and Jesus.

PAUSE

Today is our third week in the Book of Revelation.

By now, you will realise that John's book is a multi-sensory vision.
 It is filled with sights and sounds and odours and tastes and feelings.
 You might even say that John has a real case of literary synesthesia
 Where there is a blurring of all these senses. (see Rev 1:12 & 5:11)

Today, we are continuing to explore John's second vision
 Where he has been transported to the throne room of God.
 We hear how the One on the throne hold a scroll
 That is sealed with seven seals.

John is desperate to have the scroll opened—
 because it contains God's plan for redemption and restoration.
 (see Buist M Fanning "Revelation" *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* 213)

But the problem is that there doesn't seem to be anyone
 Who is 'worthy' to break to seals
 And reveal what is inside.

John is so frustrated that he weeps.

That is, until one of the elders
 Announces that there is one
 Who can open the scroll.

This one is described as the 'Lion of the tribe of Judah'
 And the 'Root of David'.

Those who are familiar with Scripture will
Recognise that these are Old Testament
Descriptors of the promised Messiah.

When the Patriarch Jacob blessed his sons,
At the end of his life, he prophesied
The family leadership would remain with his fourth son, Judah.

“Judah is a lion’s cub...
The sceptre will not depart from Judah...
until he to whom it belongs shall come.” (Genesis 49:9-10)

Jacob is speaking of King David,
But also of David’s greater son, Jesus.

Many years after the reign of David (and the collapse of his kingdom)
Jesus is spoken of again
As “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse
[that is, David’s father];
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.” (Isaiah 11:1)

In John’s vision
One of the elders around God’s throne
Speaks about a Lion and Branch
Who is worthy to open the scroll.

But here’s where it gets interesting.
The Lion is announced, but what appears is a lamb.
And not just any lamb, but one that has been slain, and yet lives.
Lion... and lamb?
The paradox couldn’t be starker.
Power and vulnerability.
Majesty and meekness.
Judgment and mercy—bound up in the same figure. (Revelation 5:6)

This lamb approaches the throne
And takes the scroll from the One
sitting on the throne.

And then he receives the worship and adoration
Of the the living creatures, the elders
And the myriad of angels around them.

Why a lamb?
More than that, a lamb that has been slain
And is yet alive?

Again, if you know your Bible, you will know
Lambs are significant creatures.

Beginning with the Passover
Where a lamb’s blood protected
The people from God’s avenging angel
To the system of temple sacrifice
Where a lamb’s blood
Was used to atone for the people’s sins
The lamb was a creature
Whose life was offered to God as an exchange
so a frequently disobedient people
Could live at peace with their Holy God.

Of course Scripture looked towards a time when
This system of animal sacrifice would end,
Where an representative human would stand in our place
Bearing our sins and offering us his righteousness.

This was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah
In his description of the Suffering Servant:
“But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5)

This was prophesied by Isaiah and fulfilled by Jesus on the cross.
 Jesus, the One whom John the Baptist proclaimed as
 “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29-31)

Jesus is the Lion.
 Jesus is also the Lamb who was slain.

But what are we to make
 Of these surprisingly different images
 Applied to the same person.

On the one hand we have a lion.
 Many countries, including our own, use the lion
 as a symbol of courage and royalty.

But a lamb?
 A lamb looking like it had been slain?
 No modern country uses the lamb as a primary national symbol.
 The lamb often conveys innocence, sacrifice, or pastoral life.

Many people have wrestled with these
 Surprisingly different descriptors of Jesus
 And how to integrate them into a whole.

Some describe these as two different aspects
 Of Jesus’ character, two faces or masks,
 That are revealed to different people
 Or at different times.

To those loved by God, Jesus is a lamb.
 To those who reject God, Jesus is a lion.
 Alternately some see Jesus’ first coming is as lamb
 and his second coming will be a lion.

In my view these ‘takes’ are problematic.
 Jesus remains unintegrated.
 Our Lord is given multiple personalities.

Others argue that one of two different descriptions
 Is in fact subsumed by the other.
 Jesus isn’t equally Lion and Lamb.
 The lamb is really a lion.
 Think of a warrior sheep or ram.
 Or the Lion is really a Lamb.
 It is entirely gentle and tame.

Again, these ‘takes’ are in my view, problematic.
 They don’t take seriously the Biblical depictions
 Of God’s compassion AND holiness
 Of Jesus’ grace AND judgement.
 Either you get a God who forgives and fails to uphold justice
 Or a God who judges without mercy.

So what option are we left with?
 We are left with a tension of two surprisingly different attributes.

In Jesus’ death we receive grace and forgiveness.
 But that doesn’t mean that ongoing disobedience remains unchallenged.
 Jesus will break the seals of the scrolls
 unleashing a torrent chastisement and judgment.

The one whose robe is already dipped in blood,
 To demonstrate his sacrifice
 will one day ride in judgment, treading “the winepress
 of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty” (Revelation 19:15)

I like the way that C.S. Lewis describes our Lord
 In the figure of Aslan the Lion.
 Listen to this dialogue between Susan and Lucy
 And Mr. & Mrs. Beaver.

Susan: “Is—is he a man?”

Mr. Beaver: *“Aslan a man!”* said Mr. Beaver sternly.
*“Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the wood
 and the son of the great Emperor-beyond-the-Sea.
 Don’t you know who is the King of Beasts?
 Aslan is a lion—the Lion, the great Lion.”*

“Ooh!” said Susan, *“I’d thought he was a man. Is he—quite safe?
 I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.”*

Mrs. Beaver: *“That you will, dearie, and make no mistake,
 if there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan
 without their knees knocking,
 they’re either braver than most or else just silly.”*

Lucy: *“Then he isn’t safe?”*

Mr. Beaver: *“Safe?”* said Mr. Beaver.
*“Don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you?
 Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe.
 But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”*

Maybe this is complicating things, as Lewis’ dominant image is in fact a lion.
 But it is a lion who is both ferocious and loving,
 offering his own life as a sacrifice in exchange for Edmund
 Who fell to the temptation of the White Witch.

Maybe another story is helpful.
 I’m sure you’ve heard this before
 But it is worth retelling as it captures
 The blend of strength and authority
 And compassion and sacrifice
 That John is evoking in those images of the Lion and the Lamb.

It’s a story about a young man caught speeding
 and is brought before a judge.

The fine is steep. The man can’t pay.
 And if you can’t pay, you will go to jail.
 The judge, passes sentence,
 And then steps down from the bench,
 removes his robe and pays the fine himself.

Why? Because the judge is his father.
 Justice demands the penalty be paid. Mercy pays it.

This is what we see in the Lamb who is the Lion.
 He doesn’t set aside the scroll—he opens it.
 But only after bearing its judgment in his own body.
 He’s not safe. But he’s good.
 And he’s worthy—worthy of our trust, our worship, and our very lives.

To God be the glory. Amen.