

Revelation 7:9-14

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!'

And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped

God, singing,

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

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, 'Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?' I said to him, 'Sir, you are the one that knows.' Then he said to me, 'These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Sermon – June 28, 2020. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Heaven is hard to imagine. Some people think of what they love doing here on earth and then keep doing that there; golfing, fishing, woodwork, reading from heaven's library. The Bible gives us some descriptive language that is always focused on Jesus, on worshipping him One of my favorites is from Revelation 7. There is a great multitude that no one can count made up from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages. That means all the languages

represented in our gathering today – that means Swahili, that means all the other languages spoken and understood. That means people of all colors. What a diverse and beautiful mix of people. And what are they doing in this descriptive picture? They are standing before God's throne, before the lamb, the lamb of God, Jesus. And they have palm branches in their hands. That sounds like Palm Sunday with Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem. And they are shouting words of praise to the Lamb. There are no viruses so they don't need masks. They don't have to practice physical distancing. They can sing and shout at the top of their voices. All the suffering, the challenges of living on earth have been transformed, and worship is central. 'Salvation belongs to God who sits on the throne.' And angels are worshipping there too and calling out their praise. Beautiful. I have this image in my mind in thinking of the third petition of the Lord's Prayer. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. How is God's will done in heaven? By angels, by the redeemed. What would that mean? Is there discrimination in heaven? Is there racism in heaven? Is there the demonization of people who are different in heaven? Is there poverty and hunger in heaven? Are white people dominant in heaven? From this scripture from Revelation and from others, I say a resounding NO. There is no white supremacy in heaven. The people of all nations and languages and tribes and colors are gathered before the lamb, their hands uplifted in praise. They are taken up in worship. Their focus is on Jesus. And I'm sure it is on each other. They are not bumping each other out of the way to get to the big stage, to get closer to God. They are not trampling on others to get God's blessing. And we hold that picture, bringing it to earth. Thy/your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. That's the disciples' prayer. That's our vision which we hold to, which we work towards on earth. At Ascension we haven't had communion for a long time. We are going to start to have at least the bread soon.

When we have Holy Communion, we are pulled into that heavenly vision. We have a foretaste of the feast that is to come. We have the appetizer of the main entrée. Holy Communion brings a deep unity to those who partake of it together, people of various backgrounds, nations, colors, income levels. When Jeff Mosher, a man who was homeless, received communion, it made it very clear that we were completely united with him, and he with us, all one in Jesus, all fully loved in Jesus. Holy Communion gives a vision of all being fed, a vision that all are loved by God, a vision to live into and live out. For Phil Lebold's memorial services on Saturday, July 11, one of the scriptures will be from Revelation 21; the reading about the new heaven and the new earth, that new dimension of time and space where Jesus is making everything new, where there is no more grief, no more pain, no more heart attacks, no more death. It's one of my most favorite scriptures. And the Good News is that from that future, Jesus breaks into our present, empowering us to be involved in making things new right now. We won't be able to do that perfectly as it is in heaven, but we can work into the vision. Phil did. I will be saying more about that at his services, but think of his setting the altar area for our first service back, for Pentecost – with the extra candles with their red bows. This altar area spoke of the power and wonder of the Holy Spirit blowing into our time, transforming, bringing new understanding, bringing change. And now we can say that Phil is working with the heavenly altar. That must be amazing. This is what Martin Luther writes about the third petition. 'Your will be done, on earth as in heaven. What does this mean? In fact, God's good and gracious will comes about without our prayer, but we ask in this prayer that it may come about in and among us. How does this come about? Whenever God breaks and hinders every evil scheme and will – as are present in the will of the devil, the world, and our flesh—that would not allow us to hallow God's

name and would prevent the coming of his kingdom, and instead whenever God strengthens and keeps us steadfast in his word and in faith until the end of our lives. This is God's good and gracious will.' Luther is realistic about the forces working against God's will being done on earth as they are in heaven. Luther had a strong sense of the devil whom he saw as an adversary, a fierce opponent who had already been defeated by Jesus. Luther also mentioned the world, the forces against God's purposes however defined, and our flesh, our own sinfulness, our own looking out for number one, easily being taken over by fear, preserving our comforts at the expense of others, giving ultimate worth to small g gods. There are many ways to define sin. In the current discussions about racism, we hear the term systemic. It's more like group sin. In the DNA. Whole communities of people are taught to see others as threatening, and somehow less than them. Christians do this too. There is a theory that there is always a need for an enemy, someone to be afraid of, to rail against. This seems to be a big part of our politics. Sadly in his later life Martin Luther saw Jews as enemies of that society. And Jesus pops in with – Love your enemies. Pray for them. That's not easy to do. There are people that may want to do us literal harm, and we need to keep boundary with that. But hearts need to change. There is learning, there is listening about those more different from us. Many of you know that for some time I made deliberate visits to the Global Mall to drink Somali tea. With the Covid, that opportunity is more difficult, but when Covid recedes, personally I would love a few of you keeping that going. When you sit to drink tea at the tea area you can be sure that people will come and talk to you and welcome you there. And if they sit down to talk, ask them how life is going for them in America. Tell them you are from Ascension up the road, and that you wish them well. And God works through these conversations. These meetings are remembered. In Romans chapter

12 there is a wonderful scripture verse – ‘Rejoice with those who rejoice; Weep with those who weep.’ And to me it seems that at this time there is a lot of weeping going on. If you have African American friends, this is a time for listening, and if they are weeping, to weep with them. Don’t interject how to fix things. It is a time for deep listening and weeping. I could add to this verse – Lament with those who lament. That’s heaven’s work. That’s representing Jesus the lamb who was crucified and is alive. And some will always be raised up to speak out in prophetic ways, and what they say will not be comfortable, and there will be push back and sometimes severely so. Those of you who are FB friends know that I work on posting thoughtful things, sometimes challenging things. They are challenging to me, like this one; ‘In an abusive system, when someone speaks up about something negative within the system, those in positions of power make the questioner the problem, saying things like – You are being divisive, You are a gossip, You are too sensitive, you are being disloyal, you are being rebellious. How dare you talk about this. The post concludes – This gaslighting is a powerful form of control. Such interrupters are doing heaven’s work. They may not specifically have the Revelation picture in mind, but they are working to make things new, more just, more equitable, more fair. Not perfectly. Here on earth things are complex; there is back and forward movement. Luther would interject here – Sin boldly. He means that as Christians we are both saints and sinners. He means that in standing up for justice, we may be helping some, and possibly harming others. His famous words are really against inaction. We pray, we listen, we speak out, not perfectly but better than we speak. I pray for courage for the people of Ascension, for speaking out against injustice when that is needed, for speaking words of peace, for caring action, for bringing a fuller picture of heaven here on earth. Go for it. Amen.

