Fourth Sunday of Easter; May 11, 2025
Revelation 7:9-17
“Your Perfect Lamb Is Your Perfect Shepherd”

**After these things I looked, and there was great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing in front of the throne of the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and with palm branches in their hands. They called out with a loud voice and said:**

**Salvation comes from our God, who sits on the throne, and from the Lamb.**

**All the angels stood around the throne, the elders, and the four living creatures. They fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying:**

**Amen. Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and might belong to our God forever and ever. Amen.**

**One of the elders spoke to me and said, “These people dressed in white robes, who are they and where did they come from?”**

**And I answered him, “Sir, you know.”**

**And he said to me:**

**These are the ones who are coming out of the great tribulation.
They have washed their robes and made them white with the blood of the Lamb.
Because of this they are in front of the throne of God,
and they serve him day and night in his temple.
He who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them.
They will never be hungry or thirsty ever again.
The sun will never beat upon them, nor will 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.
And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.**

In the seventh chapter of his Revelation, God opens the kingdom of heaven to St. John and gives him a glimpse of what is happening there. In that vision, one thing St. John sees is a Lamb. But this Lamb is different. This Lamb is the Son of God who has bled, died, and risen for the people of God. In heaven St. John hears the cry: **“Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”** In heaven John sees Jesus, who has achieved salvation.

Jesus is the Lamb who never once displayed the slightest trace of ignorance toward God’s will. Jesus knew with perfect precision everything that God wanted him to do – in his thoughts, his words, and his actions. And the perfect Lamb, Jesus Christ, did it all. Never once did he show any stubbornness at all. Never once, like all other sheep of God, did Jesus say, “I know what God wants from me, but I just don’t care. I’ll do what I want, and I won’t budge.” No, Jesus moved every time his Father called. He did exactly what the Father wanted. Even when the Father wanted to sacrifice his Lamb for our sins, Jesus listened and walked obediently to the cross. And there, the holy Lamb of God was sacrificed for our salvation. The Lamb won it for us.

We need the Lamb of God to save us with his holiness, because we are imperfect sheep. Like actual sheep we can be silly, stubborn people when it comes to doing what God wants. The stubbornness we show is sometimes willful, which is toxic to Christian faith. I know what God wants me to do; he has told me in his Word, over and over again. I hear him tell me. But I just won’t budge. Or maybe I will budge, to do what he has told me not to. Pure, willful stubbornness. On the other hand, the sheep-like dumbness we display may not be intentional. Sometimes we don’t do what God wants because we haven’t even bothered listening to his will in his Word. We don’t budge and do what he wants because we don’t even know what he wants; we haven’t even bothered to listen.

The Lamb’s goodness – not ours – is why St. John gets to see all these amazing things that he sees in this vision. Because the Lamb of God walked obedient in the Father’s will, because he sacrificed himself, heaven is open to all who believe in him. This is why John gets to see **a great multitude that on one could count, from every nation, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.** John sees heaven packed with those whom the holy Lamb of God saved. He sees an innumerable crowd made up of every color, coming from every place, and speaking every language. All these people, so different in so many ways, have one thing in common: all the stupidity and stubbornness that they showed as God’s sheep has been washed away by the holy Lamb’s blood.

When John asks one of heaven’s elders who these people are, the elder answers, **“These are they who have come out of the great tribulation [life in this world]; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”** Blood usually stains. But not the blood of the Lamb Jesus Christ. His blood washes us clean of every sin we have committed. The perfection that God requires from his sheep belongs to us in the perfect life and holy blood of Jesus, our Lamb.

That’s why John saw those countless souls in heaven. And that’s why we will join them one day, too. Jesus is our Lamb. We are God’s sinful sheep, but in Christ we are also his holy sheep, washed clean by the blood of the Lamb.

This Lamb has been sacrificed for our sins, but he has also risen to live as our Shepherd. So those souls in heaven – and we, too, when we arrive – will see Jesus not just as the Lamb, but also as the Shepherd of his people.

The elder of heaven also told St. John, **“For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will guide them to springs of living water.”** So the Lamb of heaven is also the Shepherd of the souls there, and he will be their Shepherd forever. As their perfect Shepherd, he will do what every good shepherd does: lead his sheep to springs of water. But this water is not two hydrogen atoms bonded with an oxygen atom. This is the living water of heaven. Heaven’s living water is a relief from all the woes and troubles that people experience on this side of eternity. That means, in the elder’s words: no more hunger or thirst; no more tears – God will wipe every one of them away.

Not only that, but their risen Lamb, their Shepherd, will do something more that good shepherds do: he “**will spread his tent over them.”** The Bible was written in a time and place where the sun was lethal. Most people worked outdoors, most worked during the day, and most of the days were sunny and hot. Kind landowners provided jars of water and tents for shade for their laborers. But you could not stand in the shade too long. It was back out into the sun. Being tan was a bad thing; it meant you had to work a job where you were slowly cooking to death. What’s your sun? What beats down on you day after and slowly saps the life out of you? Rush hour traffic? And endless line of medicine bottles? The knee that shoots pain with every step? If that’s all you suffer, count yourself blessed. In many parts of the world, Jesus’ sheep suffer the heat of full-on persecution and sometimes death. That’s their heat. But all the fears and pressures and worries – all the heat – that these souls suffered through in this life, all the pain and turmoil will be gone, because they will be under the protection of their Shepherd, the Lamb who lived and died for them. And what will those souls in heaven, whose sins were washed away by the Lamb’s blood, do to thank their Shepherd? For all eternity, John is told, **“they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple.”** The souls in heaven will worship the perfect Lamb who is also their perfect Shepherd. They will rejoice for him and in him forever, in a perfect, eternal temple. You will not be bored in heaven. You will have work to do, service to perform for the Lamb. Minus the rush hour, the oppressive boss, and the worn-out mind at the end day. Just the pure joy of serving the Lamb who lived holy in your place and washed you clean in his own blood.

So, I want you to think of someone you love who has reached the throne of their perfect Lamb and perfect Shepherd in heaven. I want you to think of someone you love who was washed by the blood of Lamb, who received the Lamb’s holiness through faith. But I don’t want you to think of that person and be sad. Please think of them and remember: the Lamb washed them clean, and now the Lamb is their Shepherd in heaven. He leads them now to heaven’s living water and has removed their hunger, thirst, pain, and worries. He shelters them now from all harm. And they get to serve him day and night in the temple of heaven. Be happy for them, even though you’re sad to miss them.

And please also remember that you are going to join that innumerable crowd in heaven. Your Lamb will be your eternal Shepherd in heaven, too. So, whatever makes you sad or upset or afraid now – whatever causes you pain or grief, including having to say goodbye for a while to people you love – you will experience no more. You will come out of this world’s tribulation wearing the white robe of Christ. The living water of heaven will be yours to drink, too. Your perfect Lamb and Shepherd will shelter you through eternity, too. And you, too, will have the joy of praising him through endless ages.

And you might think, “That’s great for after I die. But what about the meantime?” After all, the implication in these verses is that if heaven’s Perfect Lamb and Shepherd will remove hunger and pain and sadness, that means the people who have not reached heaven are still experiencing those things. And that, of course, includes you and me. For goodness sake, the elder of heaven calls life on this side of heaven, **“the great tribulation.”** So what about now?

Now your soul is already washed clean by the blood of the Lamb. Now your Lamb who was slain is living again to be your Shepherd. He is not just the Good Shepherd of his souls in heaven. No, he is our Good Shepherd here, too. While it is true that we do go through hard times in this world of tribulation, it is also true that Jesus lives to guide us to living water as well. He leads us to living water of his love and forgiveness, his promise of heaven through faith in him. In that way he cares for his people in this world, too. No matter what we go through, he is always present in his Word and sacraments to strengthen us with his love and forgiveness, to cheer us with the sure hope of heaven.

So how do we now treat our Shepherd while he cares for us in this world, while we wait to become sheep in his heavenly kingdom? We leave behind all the negative traits of sheep. No more ignorance of what our Shepherd wants us to do. Learn his will. Know it well. And once we know it well, no more stubbornness, either. Do the will of your Good Shepherd. Listen to him and follow his will.

We have every reason to follow our Shepherd that way, because he has proven to us how much he loves us. He has made us his own sheep. So now we treat him as our Good Shepherd, listen to his voice, and follow his Word. Not the world’s voice; not your heart; his voice. Listen to it and follow it.

This is what Jesus’ forgiven sheep do here until we do it perfectly in the kingdom of heaven. And we will, together with everyone else in his heavenly kingdom. His is the perfect Lamb who takes away our sins. And he is risen to be the perfect Shepherd of his sheep in heaven and on earth. In the end, for all this marvelous truth, we can only echo the praise of his heavenly kingdom: **“Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever! Amen!”**