

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

Led by the Lamb

Revelation 7:9-17

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." ¹¹ All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" ¹³ Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes-- who are they, and where did they come from?" ¹⁴ I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. ¹⁶ Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ 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."

Are you a leader or a follower? People's personalities generally fall into one of these two categories. Just ask one of our teachers from our Learning Center and they will probably be able to tell you which of the children in their classroom are leaders and which are followers. It shows itself at a very young age. And society needs both. You know what happens when you have a room full of leaders or a room full of followers trying to accomplish something. Usually, nothing gets done. We are thinking of leading and following this Sunday as today we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday. The relationship between a shepherd and his sheep is all about leading and following. What is truly amazing is the fact that Jesus does both. He is both the Lamb of God and the Good Shepherd. This is the kind of Savior we all need. As we again look at a glimpse of heaven from John's Revelation, we see that our lives are eternally better when we are ***Led by the Lamb.***

In Revelation chapter 7, John is given a vision of heaven shortly after the great Day of Judgment. In the previous chapter, we read of God's judgment coming down on all the inhabitants of the earth. All the people are terrified. They ask the question: "*The great day of wrath has come and who can stand?*" In this morning's reading John sees a group of people who are able to stand after God's judgment. Not only do they stand, they wave palm branches in the air and shout praise to God. What a scene! John writes, "*After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.* ¹⁰ *And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our*

God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” This group of people is very certain why they are enjoying the glory of heaven instead of the condemnation of hell. It is all because of the Lamb.

A lamb has only one real task in life—to follow where the shepherd leads. That sounds simple. But it doesn't always prove to be that way. Sheep like to wander and follow their own path at times. That is how we act, isn't it? Our only task in life is to follow where the Lord leads and do his will. But we like to wander. Our sinful nature bristles at the thought of being led by anyone—even if it is the Lord. We think we know a better way. We think God's way is too difficult, or too boring, or too unpopular. And so we stray from the path. This is the height of foolishness. Who is the sheep to think he knows the way better than the Shepherd? If we continue to follow our own sinful and selfish way throughout life, the path may wander all over the place but it eventually leads to one common destination—hell.

That is why God sent his Son Jesus to this earth. Jesus needed to follow his Father's will in a way that none of us can. He needed to follow perfectly. And that is what he did. Throughout his life on this earth, we see Jesus acting as the Lamb—following his Father's will completely, even to the point of death. Jesus was not just any old lamb. He was the sacrificial lamb. He was the Lamb who gave his life for all the other sheep. He lived perfectly and he died innocently. The result was our salvation. That is why the hosts of heaven sing: *“Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”*

The need for Jesus the Lamb becomes very clear when one of the elders describes for the apostle John who these people in white robes are exactly. He says, *“These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”* Only through faith in the blood of Jesus is this group of people able to stand God's judgment. We need that cleansing if we, too, wish to be among those who enjoy the glory of heaven. It's not something we can earn or accomplish on our own. We will stand forgiven before God because we trust in the sacrifice of the Lamb; and, in so doing, his blood cleanses us from all sin. What a joyous thought to know that we will one day be singing God's praise in heaven, worshipping at his throne. This is only possible because Jesus followed perfectly as the Lamb of God.

In the final verses of our reading, we see an amazing shift in the picture. Jesus the Lamb becomes Jesus the Shepherd. It seems impossible for one person to both the lamb and the shepherd. But this is no ordinary person. This is the God-man, Jesus Christ. In his sacrificial life and death, he is truly the Lamb. But as the one who leads his people, he is also the Good Shepherd. As we look at that throng of people gathered before the throne of God, we realize they are not only shouting the praises of God, but they are also working. What are they doing? The elder explains to the apostle John that they *“are before the throne of God and they serve him day and night in his temple.”* To serve God is another way to say that they follow God. They do as he wishes. Why do they do this? They follow their Good Shepherd because he is such a good shepherd. He takes care of them completely. Following him means having all their needs met every day. It's no surprise that they follow.

Look at how he takes care of their needs. *“Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat.”* The Shepherd takes care of their physical needs. They don't have to worry about their bodies, whether they will be feed or

clothed or cared for. The Shepherd has it all taken care of. *“For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water.”* The Shepherd also takes care of their spiritual needs. He leads them to the springs of living water. Jesus spoke of this living water when he was on this earth. It’s a picture of the eternal life that he gives to those who trust in him. His followers need not fear death or condemnation. They are well provided for. *“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”* The Shepherd also takes care of their emotional needs. They don’t have to experience pain or sorrow or grief. They will only know joy, peace, and contentment. Their Shepherd will make sure of it.

Sounds great, doesn’t it? It’s hard for us to comprehend exactly what the joys of heaven will be like. But we know that we will be in the care of the Good Shepherd and everything will be perfect. What more could we want? We don’t have to wait for heaven to enjoy the Shepherd’s care, however. We are already in his loving hands and nothing is going to snatch us away from him. Do you realize how well your Good Shepherd takes care of you? He gives you everything you need. He provides for your physical needs. You have food to eat, clothes to wear, a roof over your head. And, as his sheep, he gives you the added promise of sending his angels to guard and protect you. He also promises that when he does allow trouble and hardship to come into your life, he will work all things out for your good. More importantly than your physical needs, your Good Shepherd also takes care of your spiritual needs. Every morning, you wake up knowing you are forgiven through Jesus’ blood. You go to bed at night not having to feel the guilt of your sins or fear their punishment because that has been taken away through Christ. Eternal life is yours. He’s taken care of it for you. And, finally, he takes care of your emotional needs as well. With your Good Shepherd leading you, you know that no matter what stress or strain this world brings into your life, you can have peace and comfort, resting in his caring arms.

What a wonderful Savior! He is the Lamb that we need for our salvation. He is the Shepherd that we need to take care of us. When we realize just how well Jesus has provided for each and every one of us, how could we do anything but enjoy our role as his sheep and follow him to the living waters. **Amen.**

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