

THE SHEPHERD WHO IS THE LAMB    A SERMON FOR EASTERTIDE  
SUNDAY, APRIL 21, 2013  
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
MARIANNA, FLORIDA  
PSALM 23  
REVELATION 7:9-17                      TED W. LAND, INTERIM PASTOR

For many years, I did not preach from the Book of Revelation. It is a confusing book, written in “code”, filled with symbols, and we don’t always have the key to the code, or the symbols.

Three folks get credit for causing me to spend most of a year studying the Book of Revelation, and teaching from it on Wednesday evenings all Fall and Winter long and into the Spring back in 2004. And since that time I’ve not been afraid to tackle Revelation.

One of those people was Brett Smith, a cowboy preacher from Fallon, Nevada, who used a text from Revelation so effectively every time I heard him speak during a Billy Graham Evangelistic Association Event that the church I was serving participated in. That was the passage from Revelation 19, in which Jesus returns mounted on a white horse, with all the armies of heaven following Him on white horses. Brett says he wants to be on one of those horses, and he’s led a lot of cowboys and horse people to Christ by telling them about that vision.

Another person who inspired me in my study of Revelation was Joy McAlvey, who had been telling me for years that I needed to do it. We’d been through the rest of the Bible twice during the nearly twenty years that I’d been doing Wednesday evening Bible studies in that church, but I had told Joy I wouldn’t do Revelation until I was ready to retire. She convinced me that I needed to do it sooner. You see, Joy turned 103 years old during the time I was teaching that study of the **Book of Revelation!**

It turned out to be a mixed blessing, because after I finished the study, she went to Michigan to stay, and died there at the age of a hundred and four.

The third person who enabled my study of Revelation was Nicole Maassen, who had studied the book at Florida Southern and gave me the commentary that was used in the class, *Revelation for Today*, written by James M. Efrid, a Presbyterian minister on the faculty of Duke Divinity School. Efrid’s work, along with the commentaries of William Barclay, J.M. Ford, and William C. Pender, provided invaluable assistance as I sought to understand and interpret the most difficult book in the Bible.

Our text this morning isn’t one of the more difficult sections of the book. In fact, it may be one of the more familiar passages, because it is a portion of scripture that is found in the liturgy for many funeral and memorial services. This is one of the visions that John the Revelator had of the kingdom of heaven. It is a vision of

heaven, particularly of heaven as it will be for those who have suffered, for those who have given their lives for the cause of Christ. These are “those who have won the final victory (‘clothed in white robes’) tak(ing) their place around God’s throne along with all those who have been faithful and loyal throughout all generations, a multitude that cannot be numbered!” (Efrid, p. 76) They are, as we sing in the hymn, all the saints who from their labors rest, and as we sing in another, the ten thousand times ten thousand, or an infinite number, too many to be counted. And they are greeted there by the Lamb who is the Shepherd.

The example of God as shepherd is found throughout the Old Testament. No where is that image better described than in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. Of course, the New Testament, too, contains references to Jesus as shepherd. He describes Himself in John 10 as the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep. The author of Hebrews describes Jesus as “the great shepherd of the sheep” (13:20) in that same verse, there is a reference to the blood of the everlasting covenant.

The Old Testament is filled with covenants, in which God makes promises to the nation of Israel, and they in turn make promises. They saw their sacrifices as signs and seals of the Covenant. But the New Covenant, made in Jesus Christ, is unbreakable, everlasting, unconditional, for the sacrifice that was made to seal it was the death of Jesus Christ upon the Cross. Jesus is truly “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” (John 1:29)

All of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, which compared Him to a lamb led to the slaughter, were fulfilled in the death that Jesus died. The Book of Revelation is filled with references to the Lamb.

But here we learn that the Lamb is the Shepherd. Jesus Christ is both the one who leads us through the valley of the shadow of death, and the one who suffered death as a sacrifice so that we will not have to fear what lies beyond our final moments on this earth. The Lord is truly our shepherd, and is truly the Lamb of God who takes away our sins.

What a price was paid for our salvation! And what a savior we have, who leads us like a shepherd. And when we come before God’s throne, the shepherd who is the lamb will be there. And we’ll never be hungry, or thirsty, or sunburned again, but we will drink of the living water, and all the tears will be wiped from our eyes. All of the sufferings, all of the pains, the ailments, the sins, of this world will be washed away as well, and we’ll be made whole and holy in the presence of our Lord.

That is the promise, and the promise is true. And with the rest of the saints, who rest from their labors, we’ll join in the hymn they sing, saying, “Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.” And amen.