

June 21,2020

Rev. Jane Florence

Title: “Every Creature Sings”

Text: Rev 5: 11-14



From Googlearth perspective, the cinderblock cubes stacked to form one of the largest buildings in town. If we could zoom in beneath the roofs, two or three of the white t-shirted youth with the blue music insignia on their sleeve would be visible in each cube sprinkled through the many enclosed. They faced the front appearing to listen, but as the appointed moment approached they mostly glanced at the time. When appointed hour hit 3:10, they peered expectantly to the front of the room. I nodded permission; they gathered their belongings and headed down the tile corridors to their command center. Then those bulky boys wearing the red t-shirts with large white numbers upon their chest and backs would look up as well. My nod would send them lumbering to their mother ship. Those remaining in our cinderblock cubes prepared ourselves for the processional.

Soon the pulsing beat of the big bass drums of the white t-shirted youth could be heard winding through the hallways, and the snare drums added a quick step to their tempo. The rest of the white tee’s with the blue insignia carried their musical instruments in formation behind. Surely, Googlearth caught the throbbing of the building with the drum cadences reverberating all hearts to a common beat. As the band snaked through the building passing each doorway, all occupants of each room filed in line joining the sacred march to the school gymnasium.

The entire school population squeezed onto the bleachers as the cheerleaders flipped head over heels across the polished wooden floor and soon the pounding drums were joined by the trumpets, flutes and cymbals. Chants began, pompoms waved, the crowd yelled, and the bulky boys in red shirts with large white numbers on their chest and back strode in to absorb the energetic praise. I didn’t catch all the nuances of our weekly Friday pep rally until another teacher turned to me during the procession and remarked, “ well, it’s time to go to worship.”

I don’t know if your high school had weekly pep rallies during football season, remember, I’m from Texas where Friday Night Lights are preceded by Friday afternoon rallies. But you know how to gather thousands just down the street here ,for Husker passion. Energy, anticipation, ritual, processional, adoration, praise, and a thousand voices sing in loyal harmony. Adamant Sports fans know how to worship in any state.

If you have ever been caught up in a moment of worship – at a sporting event, or a rock concert, or a church service, caught up in the energy and the ritual, in the praise and expectation, passion, then you can begin to hear how John is describing worship in the Book of Revelation.

Try to hear imagined this scenes of worship from Revelation:

After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." ²At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne! ³And the one seated there looks like gemstones, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald.. ⁵Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches and there is something like a sea of glass, like crystal. Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes ⁷the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. Day and night without ceasing they sing, "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come." ...

Can you see it? Can you hear it? The sound effects of trumpets! The flashes of lightning and claps of thunder! Can you see the rainbow and emeralds and sea of glass! John has painted a spectacular- take your breath away, grab the defibrillators- worship scene that would rival any Hollywood production today.

From this flashing, pulsing, energy force of worship, John takes us down a roller-coaster free fall into sorrow. John learns of a scroll that is sealed. It is the message of God. It is the truth about life here on earth. It will answer our deepest questions and make sense of a world that defies our understanding. The wisdom is within arm's reach, but John learns there is no one who can open the scroll. Not Billy Graham or the Pope, not the World Council of Churches, or great theologians, or the Apostle Paul or St. Luke... and John begins to weep bitterly.

⁵Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."

Ah, the Lion .. of course, the Lion. The king of the jungle! The ferocious beast whose roar can send sound waves of fear five miles away. And whose teeth can rip and sever meat of their prey. The messianic expectation of ancient Israel is the powerful one who will conquer her enemies like the lion takes out the zebra. The Hebrew people have lived under oppression of foreign rule for centuries and now the early church is persecuted. The Roman Emperor demands all people worship him. The Christ-followers refuse and they are fed to the lions. They are ready for the reversal of power. They are ready to BE the Lions! Bring on the Lion that will defeat Rome! The brave and courageous leader will strike a military victory of power and force, and they will be free.

Time for the pep rally, here comes the Lion! Let's hear it for Team L-I-O-N. You can imagine the band begins to beat, the angels grab their pompoms, the crowd begins the victory song... when John looks and the 500 lbs king of beasts Lion does not step to the victors platform upon the throne. Instead of a roar, he hears a baa.. It's not a lion; it's a baby shee! It's a lamb... nothing ferocious about a baby lamb.

This has to be the greatest reversal in all of literature – the greatest reversal in all of the world.

We worship lots in our world; not all of it in the church. Our culture is full of worship: American idol worships celebrity status; Wall Street worship announces our money will save us; Madison Ave. worship promises buying something will save us; nationalism worship of the Empires humans create promise they will be the one to make us all great. We really believe that we can save ourselves. That the one with the most weapons of destruction will ultimately be the freest. Humans have worshipped seats of power through fear and intimidation or in pride and glory. We have expected that the one with the most wins: the most chariots, the most knights, the most swords, the most missiles, the most bombs. We have starved our children to accumulate weapons of power in order to claim King of the Jungle of humanity.

It is worship that is central to human identity and mission. It is worship that shapes the human community. John presents us with two images for worship: human empire as depicted by the beast, the dragon, the ferocious one- or God's empire as depicted by the lamb. The Lamb conquered not through violence but through sacrifice. The Lamb opened the seal to the secrets of life and

¹¹Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, ¹²singing with full voice, ¹³Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing,

And John shoots us back up that roller-coaster to the apex of praise, Oh for thousands and thousands tongues to sing! That's more voices than fill every single stadium or arena across the country. And every creature sang: all the bees, and the beetles, the hummingbirds and the blue whales, the lion, the ox, the eagle and even the one with the human face. All join in a cosmic picture of universal worship:

“To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

¹⁴And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the elders fell down and worshiped.

May we know who we worship. May we worship with all our lives in unity with all. Amen.