

Epiphany 3. 21 January 2024. Tidenham Parish. Revd David Treharne

Revelation 19:6-10

⁶Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

“Hallelujah!

For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

⁷Let us rejoice and be glad
and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.

⁸Fine linen, bright and clean,
was given her to wear.”

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.)

⁹Then the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!”
And he added, “These are the true words of God.”

¹⁰At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “Don’t do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus.”

Hallelujah / Alleluia

Last week Tudor preached amazingly of the Revelation drama. It was a really good sermon wasn’t it... reflecting on John’s vision in that last book of the Bible. (If you missed it go on the Parish YouTube Channel to listen). All kinds of things happening... a lot of which is really challenging to understand. Lots of symbolism and difficult imagery. But there is also some really important truth and instruction to be found in this part of God’s written word.

After the scroll of Revelation 5 last week... we have in Revelation 19 with a vision of what’s going on in heaven: a vision of our eternal reality. So let us lift up our eyes above our present sufferings and glimpse the future glory that has been revealed (Romans 8).

What is immediately noticeable is the sound of praise and worship and acclamation.

6 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:
“Hallelujah!

Hallelujah means Praise God... Praise the Lord.

Here we have the original Hallelujah/Alleluia chorus... and did you know where else Alleluia appears in the Bible? Nowhere. It’s only in Revelation Chapter 19 where it appears 4 times; 4 symbolises all of creation. The voice of praise is powerful and musical, strong and sustained.

This passage is yet another prod to us in our year of worship, to be reminded of the call to worship... to do ‘on earth as it is in heaven.’ The call to join that multitude in praise... to be caught up in the presence and glory of God and to declare his praises with one voice. This week is the week of prayer for Christian Unity. When we overcome our differences and together as the family of God and praise his name it is a **foretaste** of heaven. And when we praise and worship the Lord... with our lips, with our liturgy and with our lives... it is a **sign** to the world of the Kingdom of God... God’s reign. It is a sign to the world that we are his people. The Church is meant to be a sign and a foretaste of the Kingdom!

Talking of signs, when doing a baptism, I like to be extremely liberal with the water. To immerse, to douse, to drench the candidate... for me it's a sign pointing to what I want God to do and what God can do, wants to do and does do in our lives... to be immersed/drenched in him and his presence... the abundance of wine at the wedding at Cana (John 2)! Yet, when I was first ordained, I was aware of a lot of baptisms involving just a dribble of water, a spot, a light sprinkling of water. I'm sure it wasn't the case, but the lack of water almost felt symbolic of the amount of commitment expected and planned for... "not a lot" (Paul Daniels)!

In the same way, I was thinking about our praise and worship. Whilst appropriate order and decorum in worship is very important. and what is appropriate will be interpreted differently by different people in different cultures and settings, I think there is a general principle of our praises individually and corporately being a reflection of what we believe God has done for us. We declare and shout aloud what God has done... and because of who he is. He is awesome and what's he's done is awesome. Or maybe our praises are like a dribbling baptism?

People of God, why are the so called multitude in heaven praising? And therefore, why might we join them?

1. Because the Lord reigns. His kingdom is fully established. All things are fully under his rule and reign.
2. Because God's plan (revealed in the scroll and revealed in the person of Jesus, God incarnate) is fulfilled. Salvation is won. Liberation... freedom... healing... deliverance... all won.
3. Because Evil is vanquished! And there's plenty of complicated verses before these ones that describe this. But this is eternal reality... that all those forces, those powers and principalities, those demonic forces and anti God things will be crushed and no longer have dominion in our lives. The Lord reigns wholly and fully!

The multitudes in heaven are also praising because... 4.... the marriage of the Lamb. Of course lambs don't marry! Here is an image for us. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He is the spotless One who has cleansed us from our sin and made us pure and white and spotless before him. Jesus is the one who has opened the way for us etc... He unites us to himself!

Here in John's vision, a wedding is about to begin. How apt to consider the wedding at Cana which is a sign, a foretaste of this Revelation scene. Jesus' whole ministry, God's plan, was and is preparation for a wedding other than the one at Cana... a wedding at the end of all things where Jesus, the Lamb, and His Bride, the Church, will forever be united. That's why they are praising because the full union between God and his people is realised. It's not an uncommon biblical image: God's people being God's bride (Isaiah 54:6, Ezekiel 16:8ff & Hosea 3:14ff)

7 Let us rejoice and be glad
and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.

8 Fine linen, bright and clean,
was given her to wear."

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.)

There is rejoicing, and exultation, and giving God glory because the long-awaited period of engagement is over and the marriage of the Lamb has come.

When this was written marriages were of course a tad different to what we have here. Back in John's day, there was a long period of betrothal/engagement where they would technically be married but were waiting for full union until a dowry was paid and a certain amount of time before the official

wedding day. At the end of the period of betrothal the husband would come to get his wife, and the long wedding festivities would begin.

Understanding this background is helpful to understand the wedding imagery here and elsewhere in Scripture. Jesus' life and death on the cross is the dowry payment for all His Bride, where He bought her with His own blood. For now as believers we are engaged / betrothed to Christ, and waiting for Him to return to lead us home.

A popular hymn captures this this... "The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ, her Lord; she is His new creation by water and the Word. From heaven He came and sought her to be His holy bride; with His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died."

When Christ returns for us, the wedding festivities will begin, and we will enter into full divine union with Him forever. This vision of the wedding of the Lamb is a foretaste of what is to come for us, God's people. It's a bit of the 'what is to come' for us.

One person wrote... never has there been a worthier groom. Never has a groom gone to greater lengths, humbled himself more, endured more, or accomplished more in the great task of winning a bride. Never has a Father planned a bigger feast. Never has a more powerful pledge been given than the pledge of the Holy Spirit given to this bride. Never has a more glorious residence been prepared as a dwelling place once the groom finally takes his bride. And never has there been such rejoicing and exultation as there will be on the day of this wedding!

Do you know Christ to be such a Groom or is this imagery strange, alien and unpalatable to you? Yet, here is the promise of God for us... to enter into intimate divine union with him?

We are called to be union with Christ and that union begins now... but we still await the fullness of that union with our creator, our Lord and lover of our souls. Hopefully this Revelation passage stirs within us that desire and longing for divine union... and a desire to make ourselves ready (that's another sermon from this passage).

For now, we wait, but hopefully we wait being a people who are a sign and foretaste of what is to come!

I leave you with a story widely found on the Internet to encourage you to hold on to the glorious promise of eternity through the challenges of this present age. Despite comments to the contrary I'm pretty certain it's not a true story, but it is a really good story that has truth!

The story is told about a young aristocrat named William Montague who was stricken with blindness at the age of 10. The boy was very intelligent and went on to University despite his disability. While studying he met the beautiful daughter of a British Admiral and a courtship soon blossomed into full blown romance. Though he had never seen this woman, due to his blindness, William fell in love with the beauty of her soul. The two became engaged.

Shortly before the wedding, at the insistence of the bride's father, William agreed to have eye surgery that might or might not restore his sight. The doctors operated on William and bandaged his eyes. He was then confined to bed with his eyes covered...until the wedding. William requested that the bandages be removed from his eyes during the ceremony, just when the bride made her way down the centre aisle.

As the organ signalled for the bride to enter, every heart waited to see what would happen. As she approached, William's father began to unwrap the gauze over his son's eyes. When the last bandage

was removed, light flooded into William's eyes. Slowly, William focused on the radiant face of his precious bride. Overcome with emotion, William whispered, "You are more beautiful than I ever imagined."

Dear friends in Christ... we'll experience something like this. Now see dimly, but one day we shall see clearly, face to face, as we face the Lamb and God and lover of our souls... in all his glory, his plan fulfilled... and our response will be ""Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!" Until that day, may we by the grace of God make ourselves ready.