

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, 22nd Sunday After Pentecost, Nov. 5, 2017

**The Good News About Death**  
November 5, 2017  
Revelation 7:9-17 Matthew 5:1-12

Today I am beginning a four week series with a scripture reading from a book that most people avoid if they can, Revelation, and a topic that people also steer away from, death.

When we attend a funeral, or when a pastor conducts a funeral service, it is a time of sadness at the loss of a loved one but we must remember that this loss is only temporary. The core of our faith is life after death in the embrace of our Lord and Savior.

Few people want to die but we all will do so eventually. It is a part of God's plan. We fear death and the suffering that often goes along with it but that is temporary. Death is followed by everlasting life --- that is what we must remember when we or a loved one is facing death. Death is not permanent. We will be resurrected in the hands of God just as Jesus was.

**Count on it.**

A commentary by Brian Erickson <sup>(1)</sup> that I have says, *"It is hard to get a nice coffee-mug verse out of the Revelation of John."* For many people it is hard to get much of anything out of those words written so long ago by John of Patmos, presumably the apostle John.

Revelation was intentionally obscure to those who were not followers of Jesus but Christians of the time fully understood what John was saying. He was trying to comfort the followers of Christ. His intention was to give them a word of hope. He is promising to those who felt that everything was falling apart that a new beginning awaited them.

John is saying that a glorious future awaits those who have died and are now with Christ. Symbolically they will be robed in white and those white robes will have been cleansed with the blood of the Lamb, Jesus the Christ.

Brian Erickson said, *"Blood seems like an unusual choice for a detergent. But what a powerful image! The suffering, the stains of our brokenness and fear and worry are washed clean, not by our own doing, but by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. Jesus' suffering redeems our suffering."*<sup>(1)</sup>

Let's face it, in our culture we don't understand what happens when we die. We don't know what to say to a friend who has lost a loved one. John of Patmos reminds us that for the early Christians, death was faced every day. It was a constant reality as it is for many Christians around the world.

The early Christians were often martyred. Many were killed because of their beliefs. That also happens today in many parts of the world.

Just as we do today in churches and funeral homes, the early Christians gathered to remember the deceased and their faith. Back then they would often gather if possible at the place where the person had died. Otherwise they gathered where the person was buried as we often do today at the gravesite.

The early Christians considered their faith as an inheritance received from those who had come before. Do you consider your faith to have come to you from your predecessors? For many of us it did, but often we fail to remember that fact, which may be the reason that in our culture people often have such a hard time with death.

In a sermon on our scripture reading from Revelation, Barbara Brown Taylor <sup>(2)</sup> reminds us of all of the persons who have gone before us are related to us by Christ's blood. She calls this *"the company of heaven' with whom we pray in celebrating the holy Eucharist"* as we will be doing in a few minutes.

Our second scripture reading from Matthew's gospel is the very familiar Beatitudes of Jesus which tell us exactly why we should not fear death. Death is not the end, it is the beginning.

It tells us that those who mourn will be comforted and that those who are pure in heart will see God. It tells us to rejoice and be glad because our reward will be great in heaven.

The road of our lives on this earth may be rocky at times, so much so that some people look forward to death. That is understandable but remember that death will come for all of us in God's good time, but it really will not be the end, it will be the beginning. **This is God's grace.**

As Brian Erickson <sup>(1)</sup> said, *"Give thanks for those who have stepped into that unseen horizon of grace --- who have shaped us into the people we are, who have loved us and failed us and everything in between, and who call us now to a life of hope, to a life of daring to believe death and pain do not have the final word. This means worshiping, even in the wreckage of this war torn world. It means seeing what the world cannot see, that God has revealed a truth too precious to tell, that we are a family, all of God's children, and that one day we will sit together at a great feast, robed together in a white robe not made by bleach but by blood."*

**Alleluia Amen.**

(1) Brian Erickson in "A Preacher's Guide to Lectionary Sermon Series", Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 2016

(2) Barbara Brown Taylor, "Mixed Blessings," Crawley Publications, Lanham, MD, 1998.