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## *The Revelation of the Book of the Revelation to John*

**A sermon by Dean Sam Candler**

**Easter 5 – Year C – and the Last Sunday 4:00 Service of the Season**

I am glad to be preaching on this last 4:00 Sunday afternoon choral service of the season. Every Sunday afternoon from September through May, the Cathedral of St. Philip offers worship of an especially musical character. Today, on the last Sunday of our season, we worship with a beautiful Choral Eucharist.

Of course, I am actually glad to preach whatever day it is. But I am glad today, because one of our lectionary readings is from the very weird and much maligned Book of the Revelation to John. “The Book of Revelations,” we call it in the South.

I’m different from a lot of Episcopalians. I really love the Book of The Revelation to John. Some people think it is the craziest book in the Bible. I think it is, too, but I still love it. Some people think it is utterly indecipherable. I think it is, too, but I still love it.

Some people think that the book of Revelation is better left to the emotion-charged raving rapturists! You know who they are. They are those people who have figured out every hidden clue in the book, and they seem to discover the same thing every time: they’re saved and you are not!

I do not think that. I do not think that the Book of Revelation gives us the detailed itinerary of the last days. It is a shame that this book has been hijacked by such terrorists as the post-tribulation millennialists, and the pre-rapture tribulationists.

There is another kind of person who is the exact opposite of the post-rapture tribulationists. This is the person who throws out the entire Book of Revelation: they say it is too rowdy and rambunctious, This second type of person considers himself above the riff-raff and common emotionalism of popular culture.

This second kind of person is a lot like the traditional Episcopalian! The traditional Episcopalian is so interested in the mind that he forgets the heart. Yes, we Episcopalians sometimes claim that we like our church, “because we do not have to check our mind at the door.” Well and good. But the problem is that we check our emotion at the door! We check our heart at the door.

We love to yell and cheer at sports events, but we refuse to get emotional at church. That’s too bad. We would rather speculate about nonsense in The Da Vinci Code, instead of the nonsense in the Left Behind series!

I am glad we read from The Revelation to John, the last book of the Bible today; because today is the last Sunday of our choral afternoon offerings. Like us celebrating our last 4:00 service of the season, this book is presumed to be about last things.

But the book is not a prophecy of the literal last days of earth. Instead, I believe, the book is a vision of what is occurring now. And it provides a vision of what is going on in heaven, right now! In chapter after chapter, the writer, John (who is most definitely not the same John who wrote the Gospel), the writer John describes what people are doing in heaven.

And what are people doing in heaven? What are the saints doing in heaven?

Well, they are singing! They are worshipping! Listen to some of these famous passages that they sing:

As soon as John starts the vision, he sees the four living creatures singing, “Holy, Holy, Holy, to the Lord God Almighty” (Revelation 4:8). And then, every creature in heaven singing, “To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might, forever and ever” (Revelation 5:13). And the angels are singing, “Amen, Blessing and glory and wisdom to our God forever” (Revelation 7:12).

This goes on and on and on, in the Book of Revelation! This is a book about singing! For us, who are also singing in our last 4:00 service of the season. Now, I say this sensitively and tenderly to those who don’t like to sing in church. But, here it is: you better learn to sing in church. Because, once you get to heaven, singing seems to be pretty much the only thing we’re going to be doing up there! Singing in church is practicing for singing in heaven!

When we gather to pray and sing on Sundays, we are meant to be practicing for the kingdom of heaven.

Heaven is where we sing. And, as every musician here today will tell you, as the wonderful organist duo, Ray and Beth Chenault, will tell you, it takes practice! Music and singing take practice!

The Book of Revelation, with its singing and praying and playing, is really a liturgical rehearsal for the kingdom of God. In those visions, we glimpse what people in heaven really are doing.

Revelation, chapter 7, says that we singers come from every tribe and every nation, and our number is not limited. The number we all hear about, one hundred and forty-four thousand, does not begin to define the tremendous and expansive energy of the kingdom of God. Revelation, chapter seven, clearly says that the number of those before the throne was too large to count. That is the expanding energy of God.

And the Book of Revelation also proclaims clearly that salvation does not belong to any one of those groups, not to any one of those tribes. Salvation belongs to God. It is God who is creating salvation with the singing and musical energy of all the people of God. Finally, here in the passage we heard today, Revelation, chapter 21, verse 3, we hear what that singing accomplishes.

Yes, here in the next to last chapter of the last book of the Bible, the writer finally reveals the great revelation of the Book of Revelation! John says, “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them.’”

When we sing, God is with us. Whether our song is a praise or a lament, a canticle or a psalm, an anthem or a hymn, whether it is the first Sunday of the season, and especially when it is the last Sunday of the season, our singing brings us into community with God. The home of God is among mortals.

That is the great revelation in The Book of Revelation. In this last book of the bible, salvation is not accomplished by the ways of this world. Salvation is not about winning some violent battle. Salvation is not about Armageddon and who will be left behind. Salvation is that God dwells in humanity.

Thank you for singing with us today. Thank you for singing with us throughout the year. Every time we sing about salvation, we are practicing. We are practicing for the kingdom of heaven, when every one of us, from every tribe and nation and language are gathered with God.

We practice so much, that we are in heaven, even now. The home of God is among mortals.

AMEN.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler  
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