

The Third Sunday of Easter • April 10, 2016

St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

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Revelation 5:1-14 (John 21:1-19, Acts 9:1-22)

“Led by the Lamb”

“Take me to your leader.” For a catchphrase that started back in the 1950’s, I think it’s held up pretty well. It came into the world as a request from aliens who’d just landed on Earth for the first time, asking an earthling to go see their president – and they were talking to a horse. Aliens have come a long way in the sixty-odd years between *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *Guardians of the Galaxy*, but “Take me to your leader” is still a pretty sensible request when entering an unfamiliar environment.

Whether or not you’re an extraterrestrial, you could learn a lot about a people by looking to their leader. Consider it this way: leaders are going to have some degree of authority and responsibility, but when it comes to the basics, leaders are leading their people away from somewhere and leading them towards somewhere else. So if you know what the leader’s doing on those two points, you’ll better understand what’s important to the leader and how they value their people. What does it say about a people when they follow a leader who doesn’t care about them? What does it say about a leader when their people would follow them, even if it meant death?

Take me to your leader. How would Peter have answered? When we catch up with him and the other disciples going fishing up in Galilee, Peter’s kind of lost. He rejected Jesus in his most dire hour. He denied knowing Jesus three times, distancing himself from his Teacher to spare himself suffering. But now, Jesus has beaten death – Peter and the other disciples saw him with their own eyes – and they’re all waiting for him, not knowing what would happen next. Would Jesus still have Peter for a student and follower, after how he’d left him? It seems like Peter hoped so: as soon as he heard that it was Jesus who was calling to them from the seashore, he threw himself into the water and swam back to meet the risen Lord. Jesus didn’t reject him; instead, he forgave Peter, reinstating the broken man as his disciple and friend, and commissioned him in the service of the Gospel.

Jesus led Peter from rejection to restoration. Even though Peter hadn’t done anything to deserve it – indeed, what could Peter do to make up for denying Jesus three times? – Jesus brought this disciple back into his fellowship and entrusted him with a mission that would change the world forever. The Lamb sent Peter to care for his body, the sheep of his flock.

Take me to your leader. How would Paul have answered? Back in the day, he was headed to Damascus in righteous fury, determined to wipe out the Jesus-followers there who were walking away from the teaching of the Jewish faith that he himself had studied and practiced so faithfully. They deserved to be punished for their crime of blasphemy, and he would be the instrument of God’s justice against them, as he had been in Jerusalem. Was Jesus his leader? If you had asked him that, he probably would have laughed in your face – or worse. But then he encountered the risen Lord on that road to Damascus, and his life changed forever. Paul would go on to spread the news of Jesus as the Savior of the world far and wide, even – as Jesus told the disciple Ananias – suffering greatly for the sake of the Lord’s name.

Jesus led Paul from persecution to proclamation. Jesus took a man who was feared by the people of the church and made him into one of her greatest ambassadors. Paul’s whole life and upbringing had been preparing him for the work that we would do as he followed Jesus, though there’s no way he could have expected that he would one day be persecuted by his fellow Jews as he sought to point them to life with God through Christ, the Lamb of God.

Take me to your leader. How would John and the saints in his vision of heaven have answered? All they would need to do in response was point! They were gathered around the throne of God, waiting and watching for the delivery of His final victory over sin, death, and the devil, wondering who it was that would be found worthy to act as God’s agent in that ultimate hour. For so long, God’s people had suffered rejection on earth below for living faithfully. The world was against them. John, standing there as witness to this incredible sight, began to weep in despair when no one was able to open the scroll that would declare God’s victory and make it reality for His people. But then the Lamb Who Was Slain takes the scroll – and all heaven breaks loose in triumphant praise.

Jesus led John from weeping to worship. Jesus, the innocent sacrifice, gave up his perfectly-lived life for John and all creation on the cross. In doing so, he ransomed and bought back every soul, everywhere,

at the cost of his own blood. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). He alone is worthy.

Christ the Lamb won victory for us in his death on the cross and his resurrection, a victory that guarantees life forever with God, just as the Lamb stands and lives forever. It is this moment – as the Lamb receives the scroll – that marks Jesus' coronation as the Lord of all. This same Jesus who receives the scroll from God is the one who holds the destiny of the human race in his hand. **Humanity is not ultimately under subjection to the forces of nature or the ambitions or actions of people; rather, we all are under the authority of God's will and power as they are exercised by Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.** And that is precisely why the angels and the elders and the saints and the heavens and earth break forth in song and worship: "*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!*" (Rev. 5:12)

Take me to your leader. How would you answer? Who, or what, leads you? If some extraterrestrial, some alien, were to come and look at your life, to what leader would your life point? As much as we might each want to say that it points to the Lamb, we know that's not always – or often – the case. That's why we gather at the cross and empty tomb: to be led by the Lamb.

Jesus leads you and me from death to discipleship. Like Peter, neither you nor I could do anything to make up for all the times that we've denied Jesus and followed false leaders – including our own selfish desires that lead only to death. But the Lamb of God has paid the price for our failings, restoring our fellowship with God and each other.

Like those who have gone before us in faith, Jesus calls you to follow him. Discipleship is a lifelong engagement, one that is founded in the waters of baptism where you are linked with the Lamb and made a part of that kingdom of priests. Discipleship is learning from Jesus and being transformed by him as the Holy Spirit works on you and in you through His means of grace. But that's not the end of it. Discipleship is also taking what you've been given and sharing it with others, leading them to the Lamb.

Take me to your leader. How will you be led by the Lamb? You're here today, and that's a good thing. Many forces in our world – big and small – would be glad to see you elsewhere. Don't follow them. Look instead to the Lamb who gave himself for you so that you would have life, being part of the victory that he won for you. I encourage you to be here each week for word and worship, receiving and responding to God's grace in Jesus, the Lamb Who Was Slain and now lives forever. As you go into the world under the banner of the Lamb, remember what Jesus has led you away from and what he is leading you towards. Led by the Lamb, you will experience life with God.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! **Worthy is the Lamb.**

Amen.