

I am cheating a bit today and I want to preach on a part of the text we didn't read today. We skipped over a section of Revelation which included these verses: I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, <sup>9</sup> but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."

I think this is a significant text.

You've heard the Song – I can only imagine – what it will be like to see the Lord, what will we do when we are there? And the song talks about hallelujah's and falling to our knees with joy and awe and thanks. Very good.

But I might be telling on myself here. I think for a moment, it will actually be a little scary. Will I be a sheep or a goat? Will the Lord show me mercy according to his promise, or have I disqualified myself, been too pharisaical, not believed enough... and until he says that word of declarative mercy... might be a little tense.

Luther had a note on him when he died. It said "We are beggars, all. This is true."

He knew he was going to meet the Lord soon. He knew his only hope was that undeserved mercy. He couldn't earn it, he couldn't coerce it, he needed it given.

And our thoughts on meeting Jesus don't stop here. It goes far afield. We joke, and we read the cartoons. At the pearly gates, you got to talk to St. Peter and pass the test before you can get in. Will you pass it?

I think we all know our Bibles well enough to know that isn't true. But I also think we know there will come a day when we meet Jesus and what will we say? Will we say "Lord, I don't deserve a thing because of my sins, but for the sake of Your death and blood, have mercy on me!" I think that's a pretty good line. Real good. That's what I want to say when I meet Jesus.

But what if the pressure gets to me? What if I flub it? What if I don't mean it!

And so we rehearse the line again. "Lord, I don't deserve a thing because of my sins, but for the sake of your death and blood, have mercy on me!" "Rehearse it, so I believe it, or because I believe it?" "Rehearse it," so we pass that test. That one line oral exam... "don't screw up." "Rehearse it," we tell ourselves.

I'll cheat again here, and remind you of a prodigal son. He has his line ready. He rehearses it.

Luke 15: I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."

And he comes to his Father, and we remember all the loving grace shown, the Father is looking, the Father runs... and so on. But then the Son gets his one line exam, will he pass the test or flub it? He says, Verse 21, "'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>22</sup> But the father said to his servants,<sup>[d]</sup> 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet...' Did you catch it? The Father doesn't even let him get through his whole rehearsed speech. Why? Because It's his son, he knows his son, there is not test to be passed. The son is repentant that's why he's there, and so the mercy is given already.

We worry so much about not screwing it up – when maybe we should be honest and say if His mercy was dependent on us – we would screw it up! But it isn't... it is given freely to His Children and he already knows who they are long before we “knock on the gates” or “talk to St. Peter.”

Even more – what does this have to do with our revelation text? Here is John, in heaven, and do you see it – he screws up! Kind of bigtime too, right? He begins to worship an angel. In God's very kingdom! There's idolatry in heaven happening!

We can only imagine (pun intended) he is overcome by the angel's power, and brilliance, and there is a mixture of fear and awe so that he falls down to give this angel praise...

And then boom he's sent straight to hell. Bang lightning blasts him out of the vision and he is struck with leprosy on the island of patmos... He is cursed forever and barred from the Kingdom and defrocked as an apostle for his idolatry....

None of those things happen!

He is corrected. Don't miss that. There will not be idolatry in the kingdom. He is pointed to the true God, the King. And then he is told to go give the prophecy of the revelation, this letter, to the Churches. He is sent, still an apostle, still a child of God, still an heir of heaven.

Even after he screwed up, right there.

Can this be a comfort for screw ups like us? It is to a screw up like me!

God is not waiting in ambush for you to mess up so he can boot you out of the kingdom and disown you. He is not, like we guilt trip our high schoolers, watching them so that he can silently

judge all the stupid things they do when the parents aren't looking. Just the opposite, he is working to save, to keep us in the family. This is his will.

Now that doesn't mean he won't correct us, as we see with John. This doesn't mean he will not admonish or entreat, as the Father does with his older son who is angry and outside of the party. But even in that he is longing for the older brother to let his pride and anger go and come into the party too!

And so on the Cross, as our Lord is dying, a crowd made the biggest mistake ever and killed the Messiah. Yet he says, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." Now, did all of that crowd receive the benefits of that forgiveness, or did some of those harden their hearts and continue to disown the Son and set themselves outside of the family? The Lord knows, we don't. But we do know his heart and longing and word was for them to be forgiven and brought in. And you think he just wants to kick you out at a moments notice?

No.

But we might wonder, what if I have hardened my heart and set myself outside of the family and disown the Son? Well, I imagine if you did, you wouldn't be worried about it. And you have a great opportunity here to, not disown, but to confess the Son, and unless you have your fingers crossed behind your back while you say that confession and creed... unless you want to fill out the paperwork to disown the family, change the family name placed on you in baptism... Unless you want to sell out the Savior for some silver and run headlong down that road... I might just venture to say you're going to be OK.

I'll stop cheating and actually look at our text today. It's quite beautiful, this picture of heaven. There's a river, so much grace, it just keeps coming. There's the trees with healing and life, and

you take some fruit off, more will come. It won't end. Think there is enough there for screw ups like John, like us?

And there's a throne, and the King will come and we will meet him some day. And he comes with recompense to repay everyone for what he has done... and now the tension builds again.

Will we pass this test? Deep breath... Read verse 14: "Blessed are those who wash their robes..." and what is that washed in? We remember from Chapter 7, the blood of the Lamb.

Is that for you? Is there enough for you? Is it strong enough to cover your screw ups? Has it been promised to you in Word, in Wine? Yes.

Jesus, the Lamb has been slain, he is risen, stronger than all. And that strength is scary because we know what we deserve. We know that. But find some rest and comfort because you also know God's promise, his faithfulness, his love. It's shown on a cross, it's promised and given to sinners, we see it in that Gospel reading as he prays for you, yes you – you who believe on account of the disciple's word! That's you! And he prays that you will be where he is. This is his will, this is why he made creation even though he knew we would fall, that he might save us, that he might wash away the bad, that we might be His, forever.

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." No tests, no interrogation, just a celebration for those who belong to the Lamb, to the family. And let the one who hears say, "come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

This is our God. We are beggars before him, we deserve nothing of his goodness. But he is good, his is faithful, and his mercy is for you, shown on a cross, and when you see him, take courage his mercy will be for you then too.

Amen.