

**Sermon**  
**May 19, 2019**

**Covenant Presbyterian Church**  
**Rev. Zeta T. Lamberson**

**The Transforming Vision**  
**Revelation 7:9-17**

Last week after our service one of you commented to me that you had not often heard someone preach from the book of Revelation. Probably because it is a complicated book and so much has been written about it that makes many people believe it is a book of doom and gloom and about the end of the world. And yet the truth my friends is that it was written during a time of great persecution and was meant to bring hope to those who struggled. And if we take the time to look carefully at the message we too find hope in these pages. Therefore we are back in Revelation today and will be again next week revealing some of the hope.

Last week we looked at the vision of the throne room where God and the Lamb are worshiped. We heard the powerful words of praise and hopefully experienced the wonder as those around the throne saw the lion transform into the Lamb - the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. For both God and the Lamb sit upon the throne and are worthy of our worship and praise.

Our passage today is another vision. Think a minute about dreams you may have had. How sometimes you are dreaming along and you see people you know and then suddenly that person becomes someone else and what you thought was happening shifts dramatically. At least that is what happens lots of times in my dreams! And those shifts always cause me to wonder and draw my thought to new places. We see it on our screens all the time. Animation has made all kinds of transformations possible!

Do you remember the toys called transformers. My son Bart loved them! Through a couple simple movements of the body the person became something else - often a super hero with different powers and skills. Well, that is what happens in this vision. The lion who became the Lamb had another transformation.

But first let me set the scene. As John looked before his eyes there is a great multitude of people - so many he can't count them. And they come from all tribes and peoples and languages. Think of the crowds at the airport where all around you there are people of different nations. But this crowd is standing before the throne of God and the Lamb. They are all dressed in white and they have palm branches in their hands. We immediately think of Palm Sunday when the crowds were waving palm branches for Jesus as he entered Jerusalem. This is a celebration. What are they celebrating? That the Lamb is seated on the throne with God. They cry out:

*“Salvation belongs to our God*

*who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb.”*

And everyone around the throne - the angels, the elders and the four living creature fall down to worship. At first the scene looks a lot like our scene last week.

But then a question is raised by one of the elders. *“Who are these people dressed in white?”* John knows he doesn't know the answer for sure but thinks the questioner should know the answer. And he did. For the elder tells John that these are those *“who have come out of the great ordeal...”* They had survived what had just been described in the revealing of the first six seals. They are those who had been faithful in the midst of turmoil. They had endured and kept the faith. Hear this my friends. There is hope for those who remain faithful and endure the hardships of life. They too will join the throng at the throne of grace praising God.

But what is powerful about this vision is how it reveals something new and different about the lion who became the Lamb. For now the Lamb is transformed into a Shepherd. The lion was a frightening image and the slain Lamb must have evoked some wonder and grief and pain for it reminded them of the loss of Jesus but the Shepherd - now that is an image that brings with it a whole different set of feelings to them and to us. The very words *“the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want”* brings comfort to our hearts in times of trial. And Jesus as he taught the disciples had described

himself as the Good Shepherd. This is an image the early Christians knew well and comforts their souls. Here, seated on the throne, is *their shepherd*. Not just any shepherd but their shepherd - the Good Shepherd. And in verses 15-17 we are reminded of who that shepherd is and what *their shepherd - our shepherd* provides.

First, "*the one seated on the throne will shelter them.*" The word for shelter is actually tabernacle. It is the promise that God made to the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness that God would be present with them in the tabernacle. He would pitch his tent in the midst of them. It is the promise to them and to us that no matter what happens God is always present with us. A powerful image that comforts us when the world is caving in around us.

Some years ago on a trip to Williamsburg, Virginia, to celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary, Roy and Karen Pike slammed into a truck parked along the shoulder of the highway. They were killed instantly. They left three sons aged 10, 17, and 18.

Kevin, the middle son, aged 17 at the time, told how in the ache of his loss, in the wilderness of his confusion, he discovered more than once the powerful presence of God. He went to talk with his pastor, and this is how he described the faith he had discovered. "Right now," he said, "I see God as a shelf. Everything I love, everything beautiful in my life, everything that has given me comfort and security, everything on that shelf has been moved around, scrambled, changed or broken. But the shelf itself is still intact. God is that shelf, and I know that the shelf itself will never be broken." (Retrieved from <https://sermons.com/sermon/will-2012-be-the-end-of-the-world/1441901>)

That is the powerful promise here. The one we worship, the one seated on the throne will never be broken or destroyed. He will shelter us. Not from the storms of life but God does promises to be with us through the storms. Many of us here know what it is to go through struggles in life. We know what it feels like to experience loss, to feel like everything is scrambled up, broken and not fixable and yet in the midst of those struggles we too have come to realize that God has been present with us every

step of the way. His love, his care, his presence has sheltered us through the storm.

That is the role of the Shepherd throughout scripture. The Shepherd cares for his sheep watching over them, searching for them, staying present with them to protect them when all else seems lost.

For not only does the shepherd shelter us but the shepherd also provides for us. Our scripture says “*they will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat.*” These very words for the Christians of the first century would have brought to mind the words of the prophet Isaiah from Isaiah 49 in a passage that speaks words of promise to those in exile that they will be brought home - returned to Israel. Hear those words:

*Thus says the Lord:*

*In a time of favor I have answered you,*

*on a day of salvation I have helped you;*

*I have kept you and given you*

*as a covenant to the people,*

*to establish the land,*

*to apportion the desolate heritages;*

*saying to the prisoners, “Come out,”*

*to those who are in darkness, “Show yourselves.”*

*They shall feed along the ways,*

*on all the bare heights shall be their pasture;*

*they shall not hunger or thirst,*

*neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them down,*

*for he who has pity on them will lead them,*

*and by springs of water will guide them.*

*And I will turn all my mountains into a road,*

*and my highways shall be raised up.*

The Shepherd who provides for them will also guide them to the springs of the water of life.

That is one of the major roles of the Shepherd. To lead sheep to green pastures where they can eat their fill and to still waters where they can quench their thirst. The Shepherd is the one who makes sure sheep do not hunger or thirst and that they are not destroyed by storms.

Friends, this transforming vision of the lion to the Lamb to the Shepherd reveals that the one seated on the throne is none other than the Shepherd who has guided them and will guide them through the struggles of life. The shepherd will guide them into the future. That means there is a future for the faithful. This is good news for us today just as it was for those in the first century who were persecuted. No matter what happens in our lives, no matter how many catastrophes fell us, no matter how bleak the world looks around us we are sheltered, provided for and guided by the lion who became the Lamb who is the Shepherd who cares for his flock in deep and powerful ways. Knowing that the Lamb who sits on the throne is our Shepherd who leads and guides us is a powerful image.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, when she was working with the dying, showed a group of seminary students a drawing that a child had made. The child had terminal cancer but refused to talk to anyone, withdrawing behind a wall of silence. The only communication offered by the child was through his drawings. This particular drawing that she showed to the class had a beautiful little cottage set off to the side of the paper. Above the cottage was a bright, brilliant sun shining. Surrounding the cottage was a beautiful lawn with flowers and trees. In front of the cottage was a family of four: a mother, a father, and two children at play. In the center of the paper, however, stood a tiny figure facing a large army tank which was bearing down upon him--about to run him down. Obviously the tiny figure represented the dying child who saw himself helpless before a gigantic force which was about to destroy him. Dr. Kubler-Ross asked the group of students, "How could you help this child

communicate his fears? How could you offer him comfort?”

One student drew a picture of a figure holding a stop sign in front of the tank. But this did nothing to soothe the child when it was shown to him. However, a second seminarian then drew another person in the picture. And the person was doing nothing more, nor nothing less, than simply standing by the little child who was facing the gigantic force, holding the hand of the child. And that broke the wall of silence and enabled the child finally to pour out all his pent-up feelings. (Retrieved from <https://sermons.com/sermon/oh-god/1352492>)

Friends, the Shepherd stands beside us. He is present with us every day. The Shepherd holds our hand leading and guiding us through the struggles. The Shepherd is present with us when we fall apart and is there to guide us when we are ready to move forward. And as we weep this lion who was transformed into a Lamb becomes *our Shepherd* - a loving parent and care giver - who wipes away our tears and walks with us into the future.

This is the transforming vision that gave hope to those who heard this vision in the first century who remained faithful. And my friends, if we too will remain faithful to God in the midst of all the struggles of life we are promised that we too will one day stand before our God and the Lamb who is our Shepherd joining our voices to the throngs of angels worshiping the one who sits on the throne.

Thanks be to God that the Lamb of God is our Shepherd!