

First Presbyterian Church  
Cheyenne, Wyoming  
April 18, 2010  
Rev. Bob Garrard

Worship Theme: Worthy is the Lamb  
Acts 9: 1-20, Revelation 5:11-14, John 21: 1-19

There is a very important symbol in the middle of the large stained glass window in the chancel area of our sanctuary. It is a symbol that reflects the power of God beyond the empty cross. It is a symbol of the Lamb of God sacrificed for our sins holding the Banner of Victory standing on the Seven Seals from which flows the Rivers of Life, and from which also emanates rays of light, symbolic of the Light of the World. This symbolism is taken from Revelation chapters 5-8. The symbols directly on either side are those of Moses and Elijah, the Burning Bush and The Chariot of Fire. I am grateful to our church members, and to the Rev. Dr. John Pattison, who chose this symbol of the Victorious Lamb of God for a window we can see at every worship service in this sanctuary. (From our booklet on the "Interpretation of the Stained Glass Windows and Symbols, First Presbyterian Church of Cheyenne, WY.")

This stained glass symbol of the Victorious Lamb of God also gives us a deeper sense of a relationship to the heavenly worship we read about in Revelation 5. In this chapter, we heard about an endless number of angels, earthly creatures and elders singing with full voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" These words and this symbol of the Victorious Lamb of God remind us that every time we worship the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in this sanctuary or any sanctuary on earth, we have, in a deeper sense, joined the heavenly angels, earthly creatures and elders in bowing down to worship the one seated on the throne, the Crucified and Risen Lord, who is the Victorious Lamb of God. When we sing the doxology, notice how the words unite worship on earth and heaven in the same way. "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; Praise God, all creatures here below; Praise God above, ye heavenly host; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

In similar ways, today's other two scripture lessons also lead us into a deeper relationship of worshipping the Crucified and Risen Lord, who is the Victorious Lamb of God sitting on the throne of heaven. "The abundant catch of fish and the breakfast on the beach in John both tell us that Jesus' presence and gifts continued amongst his disciples even after the events of" his arrest, torture, death and resurrection. "The vast quantity of fish in the disciples' net and the meal of bread and fish also demonstrated that God's gift of abundant grace was available in the risen Jesus just as it was in the incarnate Jesus." Just as Jesus' ministry was inaugurated with a miracle of unprecedented abundance as" when he turned water into wine, "so, too, is the church's ministry by the miracle of the abundant fish catch created by the Risen Lord." The breakfast on the beach with Jesus was a story of "celebration for the post-resurrection community, because it demonstrated for the community that its life is grounded in a real life experience of" and ever deepening relationship of worshipping God's gift of the Crucified and Risen Lord who is the Victorious Lamb of God. [TNIBC Vol. IX, pg. 864.](#)

This is a story that also reminds us of our grounding in and ever deepening relationship to worshipping the same Lord. It is this same Crucified and Risen Lord who comes to us and eats with us when we celebrate communion. He is with us when in prayer we praise or thank him for; our salvation, for the abundance of food, clothing, housing, freedoms, education, health care and fellow Christians like this congregation that he has given us so we might thrive in this life. He is present when we pray in supplication for healing from our illnesses, comfort when we have lost loved ones, gone through a divorce or lost a job. He carries us when we cannot go on. He gives us hope when our hope has run out. He gives us new life when our inner resources die out. When our faith is weak and doubts arise, Jesus is present even through others who unexpectedly enter our lives to help restore our faith as we heard in Roger Rapp's sermon last week. Jesus continually gifts us with his forgiveness of our sins and assures us of his pardon as we confess our sins to him. He makes it possible for us to forgive each other as he has forgiven us. He promises to raise us from the dead as we place our faith in him. In all of this and much more, the Victorious Lamb of God has created a well grounded and ever deepening relationship with us based on real life experiences with him in worship and in other aspects of life.

Such a deeper sense of a well grounded relationship to the Victorious Lamb of God was true for "Horatio Spafford, a lawyer in Chicago in the latter half of the nineteenth century despite all the evil that befell him. When Mrs. O'Leary's cow overturned the lantern the night of October 8, 1871, the great fire that resulted destroyed Spafford's home and business. Worse yet, the Spaffords' only son, a six-year-old, was killed. These disasters put a heavy strain on the family."

"Mrs. Spafford became so nervous and run-down that her doctor recommended a vacation, so the family laid plans to sail for Europe in November of 1873. As the date approached, Horatio realized he was too busy to leave with his family. He sent his wife and four daughters on ahead, planning to catch up with them later. On November 22, the ship carrying the five Spafford women sank beneath the waves of the north Atlantic. Nearly everyone on board died. On December 1, Mrs. Spafford sent a telegram to Horatio from Cardiff, Wales. It said, 'Saved alone!' How much more would one couple have to suffer? Where was God in all of this?"

"Horatio left immediately to join his wife. As he crossed the Atlantic, he asked the captain to show him where the other ship had gone down. When they came to the spot, Horatio stood at the rail, looking out at the cruel gray sea. Did he cry out to God in pain? Probably so. Did he feel cheated by life? Undoubtedly. Did he turn away from God, saying God had let him down? He could have. But he didn't, because in those moments he wrote these words" of a now famous hymn: *When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll; whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say, "It is well, it is well with my soul." Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, let this blest assurance control; that Christ has regarded my helpless estate, and has shed his own blood for my soul. O Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight, the clouds be rolled back as a scroll; the trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend; even so, it is well with my soul.* "Emphasis," March/April, 2010.

This is the kind of deeper relationship of love that Jesus called Peter to have with

him in the scene after the beach breakfast. It is what he calls us to in response to “his ultimate gift of his life in love.” Jesus called Peter and calls us to share this love with others in word and deed. “To love Jesus is to know Jesus, because, as Jesus’ words to Peter make clear, to love Jesus is to shape one’s life according to Jesus’ life.”

“Peter’s love of Jesus was evidenced when he cared for Jesus’ sheep” as Jesus commanded him to do. “The life to which Jesus summoned Peter, and that, indeed, Peter lived, required of him an act of love that matched Jesus’ act: the gift of his life. Peter modeled for the faith community the ultimate fidelity to Jesus’ words, because he fulfilled Jesus’ core commandment, that his disciples love one another as he has loved them. When Peter three times answered Jesus, ‘Yes, I love you,’ he is not simply giving lip service to his love for Jesus, but is in essence pledging his life. Peter was who Jesus calls his followers to be, a disciple who puts no limits on his love, who will, like Jesus, love ‘to the end.’” [TNIBC](#). Vol. IX. pg. 864.

Do we have to suffer martyrdom as Peter did to show how much we love the Crucified and Risen Lord, hopefully not. Jesus expects us to love him as deeply as he loves us, yet he has called each of us to different ministries at different costs. It was for all of his disciples, regardless of their call, that Jesus provided a miraculous catch of fish and hosted breakfast on the beach. “Those who will give up their lives in love, and those who struggle daily in what may seem the smallest places to bear witness to Jesus’ love—all receive Jesus’ gifts. The discipleship of the first believing community begins with the affirmation and celebration of the gifts of God in Jesus,” the Victorious Lamb of God. It is he who demonstrates a gracious faith and way of life for us to follow. It is by the love and grace of the Risen Lord Jesus Christ we are called and sustained as his disciples. [TNIBC](#). Vol. IX. pg. 865.

We live in a world that desperately needs to know this same deeper meaning and well grounded relationship of love to the Crucified and Risen Lord, the Victorious Lamb of God who reigns overall “through his ultimate gift of his life in love.” It needs us to affirm and celebrate the gifts of God in Jesus by our sharing with it the same graciousness and care he gives to you and me, his sheep. In the next couple of months, we have many opportunities to share all this with a part of a needy world. We will graciously host a family of the Cheyenne Interfaith Hospitality Network this week. We will join in The Day of Giving on May 7<sup>th</sup> to donate bone marrow, share our blood, old medicines, food and toiletry goods and time with our community in need. In June, our Missions Ministry will invite us to give to the Presbyterian Missions and Disaster Recovery in Haiti. Soon, our Christian Education Ministry will be asking us to become Sunday school teachers so that our children, youth and adults will learn more about the Crucified and Risen Lord, the Victorious Lamb of God, and what gifts his life and love bring to us. Our Congregation’s Nominating Committee will be seeking us to serve as elders and deacons to help lead this church to continue to carry out the vision of “Bringing People Together in Christ’s Love.” Eventually, we will have a new youth director who will need our help to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the youth of our community. Maybe just as soon we will have a new Associate Pastor who will need us to assist him or her to reach out in Jesus’ name to the single people and young adults who live around us. There are endless ways in which we can graciously

touch this world that desperately needs to know the deeper meaning of a well grounded relationship to the Crucified and Risen Lord, the Victorious Lamb of God who reigns overall through his ultimate gift of his life in love.

Will it be easy to carry out the mission Christ calls us to do? Most of the time, no. As we heard in the reading from Acts, shortly after Jesus' resurrection and ascension to heaven members of the early Christian church, called the "People of the Way" were being hunted down and killed for following Jesus. A Pharisee named, Saul, was in charge of this murderous assignment. The Jewish religious leaders at that time figured that since they had killed and buried that trouble maker Jesus, all they had to do was "disappear his followers" and the foolish notions of Jesus of Nazareth being the Son of God and having been raised from the dead would go away. What Saul and the others did not count on is exactly what all disciples of Jesus Christ indeed expected: the reality of Jesus' resurrection and Jesus acting as the Victorious Lamb of God, and not as the weak and stupid slaughtered animal most lambs were thought to be. As we heard, Jesus suddenly appeared to Saul in a blinding vision, confronted him with pointed questions, and then converted him to become one of his Apostles. Jesus then graciously and lovingly cared for Saul in his time of blindness and recovery through a surprised disciple named "Ananias." In obedience to Jesus, Ananias took on a very difficult and unpopular task of caring for the arch enemy of all Christians of that day. By God's grace it turned out well, as Saul became Paul, the greatest Christian missionary of all time. But for most of us, like Ananias, carrying out the mission of the Crucified and Risen Lord, the Victorious Lamb of God, was not and still is not an easy task.

In these resurrection stories, the Crucified and Risen Lord, the Victorious Lamb of God has come to us to build a deeper sense of a well grounded relationship to him in worship and other aspects of our lives. He has called us again to love him with all we have and to feed his sheep, no matter how difficult it may be. With Ananias let us respond, "Here I am, Lord," so that one day the whole of creation might sing with us, 'Worthy is the Lamb, the Victorious Lamb of God.'