

# CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH

Rev. Fred Weimert "Opening Day"

April 18, 2010

On Friday morning,  
 after I had finished my parts of the bulletin,  
 I gave it to Helen Ross, our Church Secretary,  
 For her to look it over  
 and print it for you.

About 5 minutes later...  
 Helen came down the hall and looked into my office  
 and said  
 "You're preaching on Revelations."  
 To which I responded "Yes."

Now, I don't know exactly what Helen...  
 expected from this sermon...  
 or what you might expect  
 from a sermon  
 on the Revelation of John...

Maybe she and you think  
 that secrets are going to be revealed today...  
 That I am going to explain to you  
 the key to the future which has been hidden...  
 Or maybe I will give you  
 the exact timing...  
 of the end of time...  
 The second coming...  
 Something here to fore unknown  
 Something... mysterious, weird.

Don't count on it.

I  
 would like you to hear some words  
 from Eugene Peterson,  
 who use to pastor a Presbyterian congregation up in Belair...  
 In fact he pastoring there  
 when he wrote these words  
 about the Revelation of John:

*"I do not read the Revelation  
 to get additional information about the life of faith in Christ.  
 I have read it all before  
 in law and prophet,*

*in gospel and epistle.*  
*Everything in the Revelation*  
*can be found in the previous sixty-five books of the Bible.*  
*The Revelation adds nothing of substance to what we already know.*  
*The truth of the gospel is already complete,*  
*revealed in Jesus Christ.*  
*There is nothing new to say on the subject.*  
*But there is a new way to say it.*  
*I read the Revelation **not** to get more information*  
*but to revive my imagination." Reversed Thunder, pg xi ff*

We don't need to use our imaginations much anymore... Do we?  
 We've seen everything...  
 and if we haven't seen some new marvel or horror on the news...  
 Then some computer graphics artist  
 will generate the fantastic and bizarre  
 and project it up on a screen  
 in two or three dimensions...  
 what ever you want.  
  
 It will be fantastic  
 it will amaze you,  
 it will horrify you,  
 but it won't challenge you in the slightest  
 to use your imagination...  
 We've seen it all...  
 thanks to George Lucas...  
 and Disney, Pixar...  
 and all the others.

As I read again the opening of the book of the Revelation  
 I was struck by two words in the third verse of the first chapter:  
*"Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy,"*  
 This stuff wasn't written to be read to oneself  
 in the silence of one's devotional space...  
 under a pillow with a flashlight.  
 It wasn't written to be graphically depicted, enhanced and digitized  
 to blow you away with the gore...  
 The Revelation was written to be read aloud  
 in public  
 in the midst of a worshipping community...  
 a community of faith...  
 a gathering of the faithful.

And it was probably meant to be read all at once  
 not in little snippets...

Can you imagine  
 the people who put the lectionary together  
 just wanted me to read you  
 3 or 4 verses from the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter...  
 That's not right...  
 That's not happening.  
 But I will not read you the whole thing either...  
 I'll just read you the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter...

But first a little background  
 In the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter  
 the author tells us  
 that he heard a voice calling  
 through a door in heaven...  
 "Come up here"  
 and he does it...  
 he goes up into the throne room.  
 and he describes what he sees  
 it is absolutely beyond belief...  
 He sees God on the throne  
 being praised by fantastic creatures

and then the fifth chapter begins:

### **Revelation 5**

*Then I saw  
 in the right hand of the one seated on the throne  
 a scroll written on the inside and on the back,  
 sealed with seven seals;  
 and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice,  
 "Who is worthy to open the scroll  
 and break its seals?"  
 And no one in heaven  
 or on earth  
 or under the earth  
 was able to open the scroll  
 or to look into it.  
 And I began to weep bitterly  
 because no one was found  
 worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.  
 Then one of the elders said to me,  
 "Do not weep.  
 See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah,  
 the Root of David,  
 has conquered,  
 so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."  
 Then I saw between the throne  
 and the four living creatures*

*and among the elders  
a Lamb  
standing as if it had been slaughtered,  
having seven horns and seven eyes,  
which are the seven spirits of God  
sent out into all the earth.*

*He went and took the scroll  
from the right hand of the one  
who was seated on the throne.  
When he had taken the scroll,  
the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders  
fell before the Lamb,  
each holding a harp  
and golden bowls full of incense,  
which are the prayers of the saints.*

*They sing a new song:  
"You are worthy to take the scroll  
and to open its seals,  
for you were slaughtered  
and by your blood you ransomed for God  
saints from every tribe and language  
and people and nation;  
you have made them to be a kingdom  
and priests serving our God,  
and they will reign on earth."*

*Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels  
surrounding the throne  
and the living creatures  
and the elders;  
they numbered myriads of myriads  
and thousands of thousands,*

*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!"*

*Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth  
and under the earth and in the sea,  
and all that is in them, singing,  
"To the one seated on the throne  
and to the Lamb be blessing and honor  
and glory and might forever and ever!"*

*And the four living creatures said, "Amen!"  
And the elders fell down and worshiped.*

**Here ends the reading.**

You know when you hear that chapter

It doesn't appear that much happens...

It would make lousy footage in our action craving world...

No one gets killed.

No hot lava erupts out

to consume a city

and melt the flesh off the evil people.

All that happens

is that a scroll is passed from the hand of

the one on the throne

to the one who looked like a lamb

which appears to have been slaughtered

that might be gory enough for today's viewers.

But we aren't even told how the lamb

gets a hold of the scroll

with its hooves

or in his mouth.

We kind-of get distracted,

because everybody starts to sing...

I like musicals

but they can get a little sappy...

and you can lose the story line.

If Hollywood were to make a Biblical "Apocalypse Now"

The fifth chapter would end up on the cutting room floor...

because it is just too blah.

However, what took place in this fifth chapter

was undoubtedly the greatest graphic description

of the existential question

which haunts the soul of every single person alive.

Does God care...

about me/about us/about life on earth?

And if God cares...

how can we understand history?

The elder's question is framing our human angst:

*"Who is worthy to open the scroll*

*and break the seals?"*

*"Who can unravel the mystery of history for us?"*

Then the tragic realization:

**No one can!**

*"No one in heaven*

*or earth*

*or even under the earth."*

**Not even the one on the throne...**

God is just too far removed

from our human situation

from our pain and doubt...  
to open the scroll of history for us.

So the scroll is handed over  
to the one whose hands  
still bear the marks of the nails.  
*"Worthy is the Lamb"*

And had they let me read more to you  
you would see in the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter  
that as the scroll of history is opened...  
by the Lamb who was slain.  
With the breaking of each of the seven seals  
comes horror after horror...  
The four horsemen of the apocalypse  
are the first to come with the breaking of the first seal:  
conquest  
war  
famine  
and death...  
seal after seal, one after the other.

Then the cry of the martyrs...  
next an earthquake  
and the sky blacked out  
Finally the seventh seal,  
at the beginning of chapter seven,  
which brings a prolonged silence.

Humanity understands these seals...  
We also know heavens prolonged silence...  
We know it,  
but how are we to understand such misery?

The last chapter of Philip Yancey's book

*The Bible Jesus Read*

was a great help to me with this sermon...  
and in that chapter he shares a thought from H. Richard Niebuhr

*"Jesus is the Rosetta stone of faith  
whose existence explains all that goes before."*

and I would add"

*Jesus' existence explains all that goes before  
and has comes after.*

Judy and I saw the Rosetta stone in the London Museum...

It is a massive, impressive stone,  
just in its size...

It is a very large very thick stone.

But that is not what makes it so crucial...

on its face is an inscription  
 printed in three different languages.  
 On the top  
     the inscription was in the ancient  
         Egyptian Hieroglyphics.  
 in the middle the text was  
     a more recent Egyptian  
         Demotic text.  
 Finally on the bottom was  
     Greek from the second century BC...  
         with which many scholars are well acquainted  
             it is the Greek of the great philosophers.

Finding this Rosetta stone  
 opened up for archeologists  
     the first clear understanding of Hieroglyphics.  
 it opened up for us all of what had been written  
     on the walls of the tombs and temples  
         of Ancient Egypt...

And in the same way  
 Jesus opens up for us the mystery of life.  
 Of where God is  
     in the midst of our sorrow and suffering?  
 Not busy somewhere else,  
 Not sitting silently disinterested  
     but beside us suffering and serving.  
 We know it because of the Cross...  
 our central symbol,  
     But John reminds us of what this symbol means...  
         by giving us this visual image.  
             Of history's scroll  
                 being taken from the hand  
                     of the One on the throne  
                 and placing that scroll  
                     into the hand of the one...  
                         Not with names  
                             written on his hands  
                                 as per Is. 49.  
                             but scars on his hands.

And those same scared hands  
 are the ones that open the seals  
     which bring those sorrows  
         which are common to human history...  
 Sorrows that make us cry out  
     *Where is God?*

*Doesn't God care?*

But we who have faith understand  
as **out of hand** as history appears.  
It is still **in the hands** of the one  
who took on human flesh...  
dwelt among us  
served with humility  
suffered and endured  
injustice and indignity  
Was crucified and buried  
ignominiously...  
But God raised Him up.

And in light of that

we now see all history...  
and we face it with courage  
and a willingness to serve that God  
who is the Alpha and Omega  
the beginning and end.  
Ever and in all our Lord. Amen.