

While we often think of Revelation as a book of condemnation and apocalyptic destruction, it's actually one of pastoral encouragement towards liberation, a theological introduction of an ethic of resistance, and a course-correcting vision quest about how God sees us. Many scholars assert that chapters 4-5 are the center of the book, providing the overall frame of divine worship. It's the reason for the words, revelations and plagues. It points to the end of the vision, chapter 21, in which the new-Exodus people (the Church) are delivered into the freedom of the promised land of the New Jerusalem – not in far away heaven, but come down into our problematic, polarized and polluted world (whether that been the challenging ordeals, suffering and oppression of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman Empire; or in our world of 2018).

**After this::** Remember that immediately before this section is the collection of seven letters written to the churches of Asia Minor. Pastoral encouragement to remember what faith in Christ is, means and implies; how it is practiced, lived and embodied in community. It ends with a call to repentance that is more about letting God in than God letting go of the people in Christ. Revelation 3:19-22:

<sup>19</sup> I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. <sup>20</sup> Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. <sup>21</sup> To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. <sup>22</sup> Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches."

**IN HEAVEN A DOOR STOOD OPEN::** While Jesus stands and knocks at the closed door of the believer in 3:21; here the door to heaven is wide open, welcoming and disclosing how the world really is, was and will be.

**a throne::** the image of the throne is repeated throughout Revelation. It harkens back to the 1<sup>st</sup> Testament visions of God's sovereign power and enduring love as well:

<sup>1</sup> Thus says the Lord: Heaven is my throne  
and the earth is my footstool;  
what is the house that you would build for me,  
and what is my resting place?  
<sup>2</sup> All these things my hand has made,  
and so all these things are mine, says the Lord.  
But this is the one to whom I will look,  
to the humble and contrite in spirit,  
who trembles at my word.

*Psalm 66:1-2*

<sup>4</sup> The Lord is in his holy temple;  
the Lord's throne is in heaven.  
His eyes behold, his gaze examines humankind.  
<sup>5</sup> The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked, ...

## SCRIPTURES FOR

SUNDAY 4.22.2018

Revelation 4:1-11

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup> **After this** I looked, and there **IN HEAVEN A DOOR STOOD OPEN!** And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." <sup>2</sup> At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood *a throne*, with one seated on the throne! <sup>3</sup> And the one seated there looks like jasper and carnelian, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald. <sup>4</sup> Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are **TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS**, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads. <sup>5</sup> Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God; <sup>6</sup> and in front of the throne there is something like a sea of glass, like crystal.

Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are *four living creatures*, full of eyes in front and behind: <sup>7</sup> the first living creature like a *lion*, the second living creature like an *ox*, the third living creature with *a face like a human face*, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. <sup>8</sup> And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are **full of eyes** all around and inside. Day and night without ceasing they sing,

**"HOLY, HOLY, HOLY,  
THE LORD GOD THE ALMIGHTY,  
WHO WAS AND IS AND IS TO COME."**

and his soul hates the lover of violence.

<sup>6</sup> On the wicked he will rain coals of fire and sulfur;  
a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.  
<sup>7</sup> For the Lord is righteous;  
he loves righteous deeds;  
the upright shall behold his face. *Psalm 11:1-7*

**TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS::** Scholars diverge on understanding this in terms or specifics. Are they 12 representatives of Judaism, and 12 of the early Church? Do they symbolize the great characters of the 1<sup>st</sup> Testament? Or those to whom the covenants (old and new) were given. In any case, they represent the leadership in the heavenly realm who are both kings and priests; who clearly recognize who alone is in sovereign.

**four living creatures::** These are the same animals as in the vision of Ezekiel 1:4-14 << <sup>4</sup> As I looked, a stormy wind came out of the north: a great cloud with brightness around it and fire flashing forth continually, and in ... the middle of it was something like four living creatures... of human form. <sup>6</sup> Each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. ..the four had the face of a human being, .. a lion on the right side, ...an ox on the left side, and ..an eagle; ... <sup>13</sup> In the middle of the living creatures there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, ... and lightning issued from the fire.>> The Midrash or Psalm 90 (a rabbinical writing on the psalm) portray the throne of God as resting on the back of these 4 creatures. In Christian tradition these 4 animals have become the symbols of the gospels.

**full of eyes::** John's vision is more a theological vision than a newspaper eyewitness report. These creatures, covered in eyes, are constantly vigilant, watching, praising and following God.

**HOLY, HOLY, HOLY ::** this song echoes nearly verbatim that of the seraphs to Isaiah in Isaiah 6:1-13 << "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.">> This textual song is also the inspiration for the traditional (*and ancient!*) final prayer of consecration of the bread and wine spoken or sung during the eucharistic or communion liturgy. In Western Christianity we call it The Sanctus (from the Latin: Sanctus, meaning "Holy") It's also called the Tersanctus ("Thrice Holy") or Trisagion in Orthodox traditions.

**HOLY, HOLY, HOLY LORD, GOD OF POWER AND MIGHT,  
HEAVEN AND EARTH ARE FULL OF YOUR GLORY.  
HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST.  
BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD.  
HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST.**

**You are worthy::** Throughout the chapter the central image is political. John's vision is a declaration of who is in fact the actual sovereign, king (or emperor) of the world. It's the One whose glory is manifest in fire, the brilliance of gems, polished stones and the vocabulary of theophany from the 1<sup>st</sup> Testament. Here John uses a phrase "you are worthy" used historically to acclaim the greatness of Roman Emperors including Vespasian (69 – 79) and Domitian (81-96). It's quite a contrast with the nature of the Three Times Holy One who promises to share the throne with the faithful (see Revelation 3:21).

<sup>9</sup> And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing,

<sup>11</sup> *"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."*

### Questions for the practice of Examen & Contemplation

- Can you think of hymns/songs use the vocabulary of this vision?
- How is this worshipful central image of the book different than what you may have expected of Revelation? How might it nurture a theological ethic of resistance?
- God is known first and foremost by creation, and the ongoing creative liberation of the new-Exodus people, called the Church. How are you tempted to close the door on God, living as if we created or manage ourselves? How does worship of our creator, remembering we are "created" free us to be who we truly are? When &/or how have you experienced that in worship?