

Revelation 19:11-16
Seventh Sunday of Easter – Ascension
Sermon Series: What Is Truth?
Jesus, the Risen and Ascended Lord, is My King!

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
Winchester, VA
Pastor Paul Krueger
May 8, 2016

¹¹ I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. ¹² His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. ¹³ He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. ¹⁴ The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. ¹⁵ Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

American Pharaoh, Man O’ War, Native Dancer, Seabiscuit, Secretariat... are any of those names familiar to you? They might not all be so familiar but I would imagine you’ve heard of at least one or two of them. They’re horses. Horses who have become famous because of their impressive speed on the racetrack. How many of you could tell me the names of the jockeys who rode those horses to victory though? If a horse’s name makes the paper enough, there’s a chance we might remember it. But unless you’re really into racing, you probably don’t know the names of too many jockeys.

Today, we’re celebrating the Ascension of our Lord, when Jesus was taken up into heaven as the disciples were watching until a cloud hid Him from their view. In our lesson from St. John’s Revelation, we’re told of a vision that God gave the Apostle John in which He saw those clouds of heaven standing open. And there, standing in the heavens, John saw a white horse. But unlike Seabiscuit or Secretariat, the focus in John’s vision isn’t on the horse. No, the focus here is definitely on the rider, because the rider of this white horse is our risen and ascended Lord, Jesus.

Last week, we heard Jesus giving that beautiful message that when He departed in His ascension He would be leaving behind a legacy of peace. More than that, He said that He would continue to give us peace through the Holy Spirit whom He will pour out onto us. Next week, we’ll get to take a closer look at that as we celebrate the Day of Pentecost. But it wasn’t just the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised would be with the disciples. In the moments before He ascended, Jesus promised His disciples that He would be with them forever. Jesus has promised always to be with you. Today, we get a glimpse into what that means. We get a hint of what of the post-ascension Jesus is like and what He is doing now that He has been exalted to the Father’s right hand. Today, the truth revealed to us is that *Jesus, the Risen and Ascended Lord, Is Reigning as Our King!*

It’s a pretty powerful picture that John paints, and I’d like to just look at with you one piece at a time to see what we can learn about our King from these verses. First of all, as we’ve already taken note, He’s seated on a white horse, not like a racehorse jockey, but as a mighty warrior. Then we’re told that this rider is known by the titles Faithful and True.

Those two names, Faithful and True, are the first big tip we have that tells us this Rider is Jesus. Revelation starts out with a seven letters which Jesus told John to send to seven of the first century Christian churches. To the church in Laodicea, a city in what today is the country of Turkey, Jesus commands John to write, **These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation.**

Faithfulness and honesty are certainly characteristics we want in a leader, aren't they? Unfortunately, in election years and in weeks like this last one, one of the things we seem to lament is that faithfulness and honesty tend to be rather rare traits in the candidates we have to choose from for our leaders. But God reminds us that no matter what November brings, the ultimate ruler of this world *is* faithful and true.

So what does that mean for us that Jesus is faithful and true? Depending on who hears that message, it's could be either comforting or terrifying. When God brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, He told them, **I am a faithful God, keeping my covenant of love with a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. But those who hate me I will repay to their face by destruction** (Deut. 7:10-11). Jesus is a faithful king. Everything He has promised is true. When He says that the punishment for sin and rebellion against God is death, He means it. When He says that His death was the payment for our sins and that to whomever believes in Him for salvation God has given the gift of life, He means it. It is true. He will be faithful to His Word.

That faithfulness is so important for us to keep in mind, because it's a pretty awesome and tremendous Jesus that we see here in Revelation 19, judging and waging war in righteousness. With His eyes like blazing fire, He can see into the hearts of each and every one us, and the many crowns upon His head show us that He has the power, right, and authority to bring justice to anyone who disobeys Him. But as children of God, we have nothing to fear. Because of the sacrifice which He made for us on the cross, when He looks at our hearts He does not find rebellion and sin. Instead, where those have been washed away He sees the new heart which He has created within us and which He as our Almighty King continues to cleanse and to purify and to strengthen by sending His Holy Spirit to work in us through the Word just as He promised He would do.

It's difficult for us to imagine what faithfulness to His promises would entail for Jesus because He has promised us so much. We really can't even comprehend what it's going to be like when all that God has promised us come true. I think that's what God is communicating to us when John tells us that Jesus has a name that no one knows except Himself. We have a lot of names for Jesus: Savior, Messiah, Immanuel, and Redeemer just to name a few. We know a good deal about Him. We know that He is the Resurrection and the Life and that He is Faithful and True. But if we presume to know all there is to know about God the Son, we're fooling ourselves, aren't we. **Only the Father knows who Son is**, Jesus tells us (Lk 10:22). Now we see Him only as the reflection He has revealed to us in His Word. But when He brings us home to heaven or when He comes to take us there, then we will see Him face to face, and we will know him fully.

There's two sides to this as well. When Jesus sits on His judgment throne on the Last Day, Satan and those who have followed him might ask, "Lord, is it true that in Your justice You are going to punish us for our wickedness?" And He could truthfully answer them, "You have no idea." But those of us who have placed our trust in the salvation He won for us might just as well ask, "Lord, is it true that in Your justice You are going to bring us home to heaven with You to live with You in joy and happiness?" And He could truthfully answer us, "You have no idea!"

Even with the glimpses that we have been given, we can't even begin to imagine the riches that lay in store for us.

Jesus is able to bring us those riches because He is our victorious King. John describes Jesus our king as wearing a robe dipped in blood, which leads us to wonder, whose blood? From the context here, where we see Jesus as a powerful and victorious king, it seems likely that the blood is that of His conquered enemies, enemies He defeats every day as He goes to war for us as our King helping us to fight temptation and sin. But it's hard for us not to wonder if it might not be His own blood which He poured out freely in order to win that victory.

When He appeared to His disciples after He rose from the dead, Jesus still bore the marks of His crucifixion. The scars of the battle which He waged against death and hell, a battle which He won. In Revelation 5 John tells us He saw Jesus in heaven looking like a Lamb who had been slain. Now we see Him dressed in a robe dipped in blood. He is accompanied by the armies of heaven, but there is no blood on their clothing. They are dressed in clean, white linen. Jesus' blood was the only blood that was needed to win the victory over His enemies.

When we think of that victory, we think of the victory He won over the devil and the justice He will bring against this sinful world, but we need to remember that He also won a battle right here, within each and every one of us. A king does not go forth to war simply to vanquish his foes; he goes to conquer. When Jesus broke the power of the devil by His death on the cross, He did it to conquer you—to win you back from sin and Satan. And now as He rules as our ascended King, He continues giving you the strength you need to fight and defeat your sinful nature through the power of His Word.

Not only does Jesus give us His Word, John tells us Jesus is the Word of God. The gospel is a person and a message. And just as Jesus gave Himself for you, He has given you His Word so that you can fight against temptation and persevere in your faith until He comes again. God's Word is not only a source and comfort and strength for His children, it is also the weapon with which He destroys His enemies.

Out of His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. We get a taste of that destructive power of the Word as Jesus wields it to defeat the Devil in the wilderness, or as He used it to rebuke the Jewish leaders for their hypocrisy, but that is only a taste of the destruction that the Word will bring when Jesus comes again and treads the winepress of the wine of the wrath of the anger of God Almighty. And yet, once again there are two sides to the power of the Word. It is a double edged sword, powerful not only strike down God's enemies, but also to bring salvation to His people. And the joy and comfort we find here in the Word, is only a taste of the joy and comfort that is to come.

Last week, in our adult Sunday School class, we started a study of Hebrews, a letter written to encourage us to persevere in our Christian faith. It's a theme that's shared by the Revelation. God gives us these words—gives us this picture of our Risen and Ascended King—so that we might persevere in our Christian faith. It's a rather fearsome picture we have here of this warrior King, as He prepares to strike down His enemies once and for all. But that King is your King. The enemies He destroys are your enemies. The victory He wins is your victory.

Jesus has gone on ahead of us in His Ascension, but He is still Faithful and True. And He will always be with us, continuing to defend us with His almighty Word until at last He brings us safely home to Him. Know that, and know it with confidence, because that is the hope and the truth that God gives you this Easter Season. Jesus, the Risen and Ascended Lord, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, is *Your King*. Amen.