

Sermon

Make One Out of What Were Many

Pastor Lisa Giacomazza

Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church

May 8, 2022

As we continue through the Book of Revelation, we find John trying to encourage the worshipers of the seven churches who clearly are fighting the tensions between themselves and fighting against the wrath of the Roman Empire. There are clear tensions between the community that worships the Lamb and the world that has been pulled into the cult of the emperor. The statement that “salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne” is defiance against the power of the empire. Make no mistake, this fight was real and cost many of these early worshipers their lives – and they knew it. The battle likely looked and felt similar to the fight the Ukrainians are going through now trying to save their homeland from invaders. Lives were lost, fighting was intense...suffering was felt by many.

And here in lies the conflict of faith – the conflict we live with as Christians. While God is almighty, while God is powerful, while we are chosen – we do and will suffer. Many fall off their faith when enduring is too much for them and they feel God has abandoned them. We are constantly bombarded with conflicting messages from a world that values things over people – the one with the most toys wins. The one with the most money and the biggest house wins. The one with the most power wins. We hear again in Revelation the Christian message that none of these definitions of victory matches the victory of the Christian life. For John, ultimate Christian victory comes in death. We proclaim again and again

Inspired by Feasting on the Word, Year C commentary on Revelation 7:9-17 by Dana Ferguson and Erik M. Heen.¹ and Acts 9:36-43 by Joseph S. Harvard²

exactly what the death of Christ means for Christians. Dying and rising in Christ is how we become victors.¹

This scripture defines who we are as Christians – we are the multitude. We are part of something much bigger than ourselves – much bigger than our own lives.

Each day when I go to work in the morning, I pass by a small farm near my home and their sheep are always in pasture at that hour. Their so round and fluffy and they always look so content in their little penned area, eating grass, enjoying the day. Don't seem to have a care in the world – because they don't. They have a caretaker that makes sure they have a cozy barn to sleep in at night, food, a place to roam and friends or a flock...I mean, what more could a sheep need. They have a true sense of belonging together. The vision that John paints for us is indeed about belonging...whether we suffer, whether we have joy, whether we have abundance – whether we have all three at once – we belong to God. When we give in to the desires of the world, we don't belong to anything or anyone – we have no flock. It's dog eat dog after all – we can't be in a group because we're fighting to be better than our neighbor...not love them.

I don't know about you but I want to be a happy, fluffy, content sheep. I want to feel my belonging...my belonging here and my belonging to God. We've had several stories shared about some of our members and their experiences here at Bacon celebrating our 100th Anniversary and it's been so enjoyable to hear them all. But I have one too. About three years ago, I was asked to come and fill the pulpit here at Bacon for about a month while the Administrative Council from

Inspired by Feasting on the Word, Year C commentary on Revelation 7:9-17 by Dana Ferguson and Erik M. Heen.¹ and Acts 9:36-43 by Joseph S. Harvard²

Presbytery continued to sort things out. I had been pulpit supply for about 10 years or so and I had preached here actually in 2012 for just one week – I believe Pastor Grove had contacted me at that time. So I walked in and it looked a little familiar but I didn't remember I had been here before, but my heart did. So I did what I was asked and filled the pulpit and that Sunday, that first Sunday, the annual meeting took place. I didn't know what was happening here but I could tell there was some suffering for the members that were here. And within about 6 weeks or so, I was asked if I would consider staying on in a semi-permanent basis. And I had been asked that by one or two churches in the past and my answer was always the same, I would but I can't – I work full time. But this time, God pressed upon me – and before I knew it, I agreed to it. And I was terrified. I felt unprepared, under qualified, overwhelmed – and as happy as I had ever been. Because for me within weeks, I knew I belonged here. And there is no feeling better than that.

In our scripture in Acts, we lean into the story of Dorcas who is later called Tabitha. She was a true disciple of her church and a deeply loved member of her community. The community is devastated that she has died and Peter comes to pray with them and God raises her because he sees what she means to them and what she has done for this community. She is one of those church members who stands in the gap for people – she made clothes for members – when you cloth someone, that is a beautiful gesture. It is incredible that this story is even in the Bible honestly – because women were not valued in society then – especially a widow as she was. She was so important Luke gave her two names – a Greek name and a Hebrew name...which is only done for the most significant in the

Inspired by Feasting on the Word, Year C commentary on Revelation 7:9-17 by Dana Ferguson and Erik M. Heen.¹ and Acts 9:36-43 by Joseph S. Harvard²

Bible. The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead brings back to life this faithful woman whose acts of compassion are central to the new reality of God's reign. And God wanted that to be very clear for the early church and so did Luke who includes this event in the Book of Acts.

Tabitha was not wealthy – she did not have the biggest house or the most money. She had something much more valuable – she had a community that loved her and that she loved. In this gesture, God shows us just how important the lowly are to him and how we all serve in our own ways.

Have you ever met a Tabitha? I have known her in every church I have ever been in. She is tenacious about practicing her faith by serving others. Tabitha's work is too important to die. With so many people in our world falling so far outside of faithful communities, thank goodness Tabitha is still alive in almost every church I know.²

Our scriptures continue to lead us to a world of inclusivity and away from a world of prejudice and segregation, power, wealth. John tells us that God's millennial reign is made real by these gifts of caring and compassion for all people and for the world so that "every nation...all tribes and peoples and languages" will make one people out of what were many. Through the power of compassion we are transformed so that we too, like the early churches, can resist the failed belief system of the world and be witness to the transforming power of Christ.

Amen

Inspired by Feasting on the Word, Year C commentary on Revelation 7:9-17 by Dana Ferguson and Erik M. Heen.¹ and Acts 9:36-43 by Joseph S. Harvard²