

Scripture: Revelation 19:7-9

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; **8** to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure'— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. **9** And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' And he said to me, 'These are true words of God.'

Sermon: Invitation to the Grandest Table

The book of Revelation is a fun book to read, and by fun, I mean full of imagery that makes us wonder what it all really means. It was a prophecy by John (the same John as the Gospel of John), written to showcase the Second Coming of Christ and the end of the world as we know it. Many steer clear of it because, frankly, it isn't an easy book to understand, nor is it happy-go-lucky. Today, however, we look at the imagery of sitting at God's eternal table. So, like much of the book of Revelation, we've got some imagery to dig through, as we look at being welcomed as guests to God's table.

Now, imagine walking into a church for the first time, not knowing any churchy language, and hearing this strange scripture about a lamb and his bride. Wouldn't you perceive it just to be about two lambs? And why would an angel say that people are blessed by being at the celebration where lambs are eating grass? Ok. So that's a little literal, but there's this strange code or symbolism happening. This code was created by the author John, beginning in the very first chapter of the Gospel of John. In the first chapter of the Gospel, we hear a declaration about Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Jesus is the lamb. But who is the bride?

We are pointed to the letter to Ephesus for that answer. Paul, known for his great sharing of who Jesus was throughout the world, wrote, "**25** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..." Here, the idea of marriage is not one of just love, but sacrifice. We

acknowledge in Christian marriage the idea of sacrifice as well, just not to the fullest extent. And there is one more distinction we need to make.

It's not the church, the building. It is not the church in one nation. It is not the church in one denomination. It is Jesus's church, what we like to call the apostolic catholic church. All who claim Jesus, they, the people, are "the church."

So, now that we have most of the imagery and symbolism figured out, let's look at our passage again.

"Let us rejoice and exult and give God the glory, for the marriage of [Jesus] has come, and his bride, [the church,] has made itself ready; **8** [the church, as the people] has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure'—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. **9** And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of [Jesus].' And he said to me, 'These are true words of God.'"

One mystery or confusing aspect has been fixed, yet there is still one more issue. It says "Blessed are those who are invited..." How does one get invited? Now your answer will depend on your theology, or study of God. Our study of God depends on how literally we translate the Bible AND our experiences in life, traditions within the United Methodist Church AND Reedsburg UMC, and the logic we have. There are some that say only those who have been good Christians their whole life, or that people must be a certain denomination. Others say everyone is given a chance at death to claim Jesus and receive the invitation. Some believe that even if people do not answer at the end of death and claim Jesus, they too, will be invited based on how they lived their lives. We are not here today to speculate on which one is right. All we know is that at God's eternal table, people will be welcomed to sit by personal invitation from our God.

So what happens when we sit at this magnificent table of God's?

To get us there, I first want to share an experience I had with you. This week, Deacon Mary Beth, Sandy Gorsuch, and I came together with 17 other representatives from the Board of Ordained Ministry and gathered at a table. We were tasked with the biannual week-long meeting where candidates are interviewed for provisional membership or full membership into the Wisconsin Conference of the United Methodist Church as well as other care for the church. This was the first meeting I was able to attend since being asked to be on the board, because November's meeting was during my surgery recovery. Friends, the honor of being able to discuss how to bring about whole health for our clergy so that the church can thrive was tremendous. The conversations on celebrations of ministry were profound. All while sitting at tables with one another. There were conversations that affirmed. There were conversations that were challenging. Yet, I know, personally, I came home refreshed and ready for God's call here in this place.

Shouldn't that be the outcome of each time we sit at the table, whether figuratively or literally? Shouldn't we have tremendous and profound conversations that affirm and challenge, that refresh and energize?

I think that God's eternal table will be one of affirmations of how we embodied being the image of God in this life. I believe it will go further, too, and simply be a celebration of our never-ending relationship with God. God's eternal table is one of grace and hope, of love and support. There is no reason ours can't be one as well.

So, let us bring aspects of God's eternal table to our tables. Let us embody God's table through our table conversations of grace, hope, love, and support. Let us challenge where Jesus sees another way. Let us affirm when God's image has been shown. Let us be welcoming at tables that have only been opened to us because of God. Amen.