

The Doxology (Revelation 7:9,10) Reformation Sunday October 29, 2017
Rev. Ian K. Johnston St. John's Presbyterian Church Cornwall, ON

It is impossible to come into contact with anything that is wonderful and beautiful, whether it be art, in church or religion, without being elevated to the point of ecstasy and praise. Many times, in my life I go back to the hour when I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour. Many other experiences such as my wedding day, my call into ministry, and God's unexpected call and direction for me to proclaim the gospel in different places and countries, produce a spontaneous praise to my Lord.

This year seems to be a year of concerts. We celebrated Canada's 150th year as a nation, 230 years as a congregation and this week, 500 years as members of the Reformed Catholic Church. Sometimes my soul is rocked with emotion as we continue to think of the ongoing Christian ministry and how it continues, in spite of decades of challenges.

My text this morning is from Revelation, chapter 7, verses 9 and 10. I quote from the NRSV, but will use KJV phrases in my meditation.

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with Palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!

John, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit did his best to take heaven out of the intangible and make it appear as it really is; the great fact of history, the abiding place of the ages, the grand parlour of God's universe. While heaven is always a grand and glorious place, this text describes a glorious day of celebration when God's redeemed from all the ages and the nations will be brought before him in their eternal abiding place. Think of what it is for 500 years of this combined ministry by all the denominations of the Reformed Catholic Church and our denomination as Presbyterians in particular. It is the doxology of praise, recognizing Him as the author, promoter, and provider for the past 500 years that we have been able to witness Him.

The Doxology, of all Thomas Ken's hymns, were characterized by the words *Praise God from whom all blessings flow...* This is today, without a doubt, the best known Doxology of the Christian Church universal. We are celebrating the 500th

anniversary of this great witness and indeed our hearts must also join and sing,
Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

First, we know the multitudes of which John says, he *saw in heaven*. In his vision from the Book of Revelation he says,

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with Palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!

Theologians and Bible scholars over many years do not agree as to where the population of heaven will come from, this world or perhaps from all the worlds in the great universe of God. Personally, I cannot settle this problem, however, John declares that those who will enter the world of glory will be a great multitude.

I have read a little bit about Christian mathematicians, who with great ingenuity have made calculations on how long this world might possibly last, and then how many people there might be in each generation, and then attempt to wind up with a mathematical calculation, that there will be umpteen trillions of souls in heaven. It is satisfying for me to take the plain statement of John when he says, a *multitude that no one can number*. At stated times, we take a census and it is quite easy to estimate how many people there are in a city, a province or even across the whole country. But who could take the census of all the redeemed from all the nations of the world?

It is not too difficult to determine the number of members in a church, a denomination, or for from all the denominations around the world. Who however, could give any kind of intelligent or logical number of the great throng that shall come up at the last, before the throne of God – from all the tribes, nations, denominations, and from all the ages. Some worship God in great cathedrals with great form and pomp. Others worship under a tree, a stake driven into the ground with a board clipped on top of it to be the pulpit.

In the words of the Doxology, *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*, has resulted in the salvation of the multitudes of souls.

Next, we note that John expresses the mixtures of people. He says all nations and kindreds of people and tongues. We might think that some of them spoke English, Swiss, Italian, Spanish, German, Dutch, Russian, Chinese, Mohawk, Burmese, I'm sure from every other language from around the world. They will come from tropical lands, from the land of Siberian snows, even from the dungeons and the prisons, those who fought with the wild beast in the amphitheaters – they will come from brown black and white, red, copper and yellow; from the main lands and the islands. Again, as John says, *from all the nations and kindreds and people and tongues*.

In this world we have different kinds of governments. In the land of the redeemed we will enjoy a monarchy with Christ as our head. There will be no such thing as an election. Jesus Christ as Lord, will be the head of the universe.

Our next thought is how John describes the dress of all those whom he calls *the glorified*. In this world our dress is not only for the purpose of covering the body, but also for adorning it. God Who beautifies the morning with blue ribbons of sky and carpets the earth with green grass surely does not despise beautiful apparel. John describes the numberless multitudes of heaven clothed in *white robes*. In the every day working world we have various kinds of apparel, that is appropriate for the task to be performed. When our work is completed here, and our earthly toil is finished, John says we shall all be *clothed in white*.

Here we often wear clothes for mourning. When we think of the world at large, there is not one second of every minute, or every minute of every hour that a heart is not broken. There are burial places without number, but thank God, the day is coming when our bereavement will be over, our partings ended and we shall stand in reunion with our loved ones who've gone on before.

An anonymous poet described the soul going out of the darkness of the world into the glorious light of the future:

I journey forth rejoicing
From the stark veil of tears,
To heavenly joy and freedom,
From earthly care and fears.
Where Christ my Lord shall gather
All his redeemed again
His kingdom to inherit,

Good night, till then.

I hear my Saviour calling,
The joyful hour has come;
The angel guards are ready
To guide me to my home.
When Christ our Lord shall gather
All his redeemed again
His kingdom to inherit,
Good night, till then.

John continues his thrilling description telling about the symbols the redeemed will be carrying. He said: *I beheld a great multitude ... clothed with white robes and palms and their hands.* In those days when a conqueror came home from a victorious battle he rode at the head of the army, the people would come out with branches of palm and waved them in the line of the returning hosts. It meant a welcome greeting and a glorious victory. What a tremendous illustration for every Christian – in that day as glorified individuals we can look back and remember the long journey we will have travelled, the burdens we carried and the glorious times of rescue which God accomplished on our behalf. Looking upon Him, we will realize that it was He who wept with us at our grave, who bound up our bones and died our deaths. In this world He was despised and rejected by humanity, but now with the redeemed standing about Him, they shall begin their eternal rejoicing. I can imagine that Christ will recite the victories that have been won for His Church, the truth, and for God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. As He recites these victories, we the glorified, trillions upon trillions, will stand waving our palms.

Henry V, after a great battle, called his troops to stop before they left the battle-field, and he asked the chaplain to read one of the Psalms of David that they might celebrate victory and give God the glory. The chaplain opened the Psalms and came up came to the words of Psalm 11:5; *Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory...* The King dismounted and the troops all got off their horses and the whole army knelt, and echoed the verse, *Not unto us, O Lord not unto us, but unto thy name give glory.*

My final thought is the music. One writer said that when we get to heaven we might be spending a lot of our time in the higher branches of mathematics. It

could be interesting when we think of this vast universe and the boundless reaches of that heavenly world, but I personally prefer the statement of the text when it says: *...crying with a loud voice salvation to our God ... And unto the lamb....*

In this world we have all kinds of songs. Many of them have little or no meaning. I don't know what we are going to sing in heaven but the greatest, according to the text will be: *...salvation from death and hell unto eternal life through the blood of the Lamb*. As we enter that gloriously, indescribable world, I'm sure our song will be, *salvation unto the Lamb*. In this world there are songs of mourning, sorrow, weeping, and anguish. There, it will be a song of hosanna, the song of triumph; it will be the cherubim, the seraphim, and the ransom filled, filling the immense cities of heaven with hosannas.

There is a story about a Christian woman who was dying. She lived in a house next door to a church, where every Saturday night the choir met for rehearsal. One Wednesday evening she heard the people at the church singing. In her dying moment she said, *how wonderfully they rehearsed tonight! I never heard them sing so beautifully before*. They said to her, *it isn't Saturday night, it is only Wednesday night. You must be mistaken! It is Saturday night! They are rehearsing the song they are going to sing tomorrow*. In her last moments it was not the song in rehearsal for the Sabbath but the song of heaven.

I pray you personally know Jesus Christ as your Saviour and have in your heart, the song of heaven. I trust that our worship today will be sort of a rehearsal for that great anthem of the heavenly world.

If you do not sing it here, you will never sing it there. It causes my heart to rejoice when I think of the many people who have talked about their faith with me over the many years in my ministry. It is wonderful to talk to with people who have found Christ to be the shadow of the great rock in a weary land, and as we celebrate this day of the Reformation, may we all be able to sing with one joyful heart, *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*, so likewise, you can say from the depth of your heart, not only today, but for all eternity, *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*. Amen