**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

**“I Have the Keys”**

Pastor Aaron Reseburg

April 27, 2025

*Revelation 1:4-18*

John is shown a striking image in our reading for today. The apostle has been sent to Patmos, a small island between Greece and Turkey, while many of his fellow apostles are being arrested or worse. There on the island, God begins to show John visions. John will be shown many more visions after this, and no one can really agree on just how many separate visions there are in the book of Revelations.

John’s first vision, our text for today, is of Jesus. How strange it must have been for John to see Jesus in His glory like this. John, of course, knew Jesus; He was the disciple whom Jesus loved. John took care of Jesus’ mother Mary until she died. John had a close relationship to Jesus, and he was closer to Jesus than almost anyone ever had been. This is likely the first time that John has seen Jesus since His ascension into heaven. He sees Christ in His terrifying glory and falls on his face as if he were dead.

His eyes are burning with fire, His voice is like the roar of a waterfall, and His face was shining like the sun. Oh, and there is also a sword coming out of His mouth. John falls on his face for good reason; he should be afraid. Reverence before the almighty God, before the Son of Man is a good thing. Reverence is something that Americans seem to struggle with, especially since reverence brings honor to something other than yourself. We love to honor ourselves, even Christians. We want to make what happens on a Sunday morning about ourselves and our own feelings.

So many churches spend so much time trying to play on your emotions during worship that they have given up any sense of awe or reverence. If we really understood the significance of what happens during the divine service, that God Himself comes to serve us, to give us His body and blood, to speak to us with His Word, and to forgive our sins, perhaps we too would fall on our faces on the floor.

This move for John is quite the about-face. John is certainly older now, more spiritually mature. If you recall in the Gospels, John and his brother James go to Jesus with their mother and ask for Him to honor them by allowing them to sit at His right hand and His left when Jesus comes into His glory. They are concerned about their own glory. Jesus is in His glory in this vision, but John knows what to do; he lowers himself, laying on the ground. In response, Jesus does exactly what He promised to do. He exalts John; the last has become first.

The all-powerful and intimidating Son of Man lays His hand on John and tells him not to be afraid. It is similar to when Jesus appeared in the midst of the disciples and tells them “Peace be with you,” calming their fears and forgiving their sins.

Jesus is all-powerful; He is the very Word of God by whom the universe was created. But He isn’t some sort of a distant Greek god. He is a man with flesh and blood, just like you and me. He truly cares for and loves His followers. So, we are reverent to honor Him, but we do not worship Him like some vengeful god that we need to appease or else face His wrath.

We should fear and honor God, but we need not be filled with terror before Him. There will come a day, which John mentions in the reading, when Jesus will return and many will be filled with terror at the sight of Him. John says that many tribes of the earth will wail before Him.

On the day when Christ returns, there will be no atheists or Jews or Muslims or Buddhists. Christ will descend from above and all will know the truth. All will know on that day that Jesus truly was the Christ, the Son of God. That knowledge will not save them, it will make it all the worse. That knowledge will terrify them because they will understand that they have not had faith.

Dear Christians, Jesus, is the first and the last. By Him, all creation came into existence, and one day, when He returns, creation as we know it will come to an end. He is the first and the last, the beginning and the end. He will return and all of creation will be made new.

We say that phrase *made new*, but have you ever thought hard about it? Nothing in this world is made new again. Things are refurbished, things are fixed, parts are replaced, things are made LIKE new. None of these things are actually new again, though. We hide the imperfections as best we can. Christ will one day make all things new,. He will make all the broken and beaten down things of this world what they were meant to be, including you and me.

Everything in this world has been subjected to futility; it has all been subjected to death. Nothing lasts forever in this world. But Christ tells John to not fear because He holds power over death, He has the keys. He is able to lock the door of our graves and allow us to live forever. That is our hope this Easter season; it is the victory that Christ won for us when He died, and it is the victory that He proved when He rose from the dead.

We have a God who loves and cares for us. He overcame death by dying and rose again to show us that death can never hold Him. Because death cannot hold Him, we who have been brought into Him in the waters of Holy Baptism cannot be held down by death either. Because of what Jesus has done for us, death has become a gateway to even more life.

So, let us approach Him in awe and wonder and reverence. Let us lay down our sins before Him and receive forgiveness from the God of the universe. But we need not live in terror, we don’t need to live our lives holding onto and living in terror of the sins of the past. That part of us has died. The Old Adam was drowned in the waters of baptism, but he isn’t done yet. He wants you to be terrified of God. He wants you to think of Him as god of vengeance instead of the God of Mercy that He truly is.

Vengeance will certainly have its day, but not for you, dear Christian. Fear not, for your sins are forgiven and even death itself has no claim over you. One day, Christ will return and the dead will be raised, and for you and me, who have been washed clean in the waters of Holy Baptism, that will mean eternal life.

In the name of Jesus, Amen