

This is the fourth week of the seven that we are reading from the book of Revelation. What have we talked about so far? The book of Revelation shows us: a picture of worship that includes all creation worshipping together, even animals, the image most often used for Jesus is a little lamb—symbolizing that God’s power is made perfect in weakness, and back in the first week we talked about how Revelation is written in the form/style of ancient apocalyptic—a person has a vision of heaven and then shares that urgent message.

Today’s reading can be difficult, trying to figure out what the riders and the destruction means, especially if we thinking we need to break a code, to find a secret meaning. But remember from the first week, that Revelation is not a code to be broken about the end of times, but words of hope especially in hard times. Stepping back and looking at this reading we see a simple, powerful and comforting message—**#God will always be faithful** in God’s promise to love and care for us.

Revelation 6 tells about the Lamb opening the seven seals that contain devastation and destruction—a conqueror comes conquering, the next horseman takes peace from the earth, and the next one brings death and hell. This is bad and scary stuff and it seems to be getting worse so we expect in chapter 7, the opening of the seventh seal, to be worse but Revelation delivers a hope-filled surprise—a saving interruption, that assures God’s people they are loved and cared for. Four angels stand at the four corners of the earth, holding back destructive winds. Even in this most difficult section of

Revelation the interruption serves as a tool to tell God’s people what they are like, to shape their identity as—**#persecuted, protected and praising**—this reminder of their identity prepares the community to persevere in its witness even in the midst of life’s hardships.

What are those hardships for John and the early readers of Revelation? Revelation was most likely written in the late part of the first century, just a decade or so after Rome had destroyed the second temple in Jerusalem and Rome’s persecution/war against Jews. John is a Jew from Palestine but he is living in Asia Minor, modern day Turkey. John lived in Palestine, there was a war there and now John is living in Asia Minor. It is likely that John was a refugee. Refugees have all sorts of baggages because of the state sponsored persecution that they have fled but the immediate “tribulation” of the refugee is social, economic and religious marginalization. John, the refugee, **#has a home in two places** but is not home in either.

There are more refugees in our world today than in any other time in history. They bear many physical and emotional scars from the places they fled and the journeys they took to get out, but day in and day out in their new “homes” their hardships continue in the form of social, economic and religious marginalization. In Revelation there is a calling to enter into that world. What would it mean for us to enter into the world of the refugee? How might you ease their daily tribulations of social, economic and religious marginalization?

Revelation almost assumes that central to the Christian life is—being marginalized—persecuted. It isn't there we are to have a victim mentality as a Christian but that the call of the Christian is so counter cultural that it results in marginalization. In John's time, the tribulation of the Revelation's audience was not state-sponsored persecution but a social, economic and religious marginalization for those who refused to participate in the Roman imperial system. What about our system is God calling us to refuse to participate in, even at the risk of being marginalized? Social norms are very powerful at keeping us quiet and making us conform. They are powerful at getting us to bend our moral and ethical standards.

In 1966, half a century ago, the Lutheran Church commissioned and then publicly released **#A Time for Burning**, a documentary film that laid bare the harsh reality of racism alive within the Augustana Lutheran Church in Omaha, Nebraska. Pastor Bill Youngdahl served the all white congregation as they debated an idea. Watch now as the Social Ministry Committee discusses a motion they wish to pass on to council. #

There many other things we could find to do but is there anything more crucial right now? The right thing is often hard. The right thing will often get people mad at you. The right thing could get you marginalized. What is the most crucial thing right now? What conversations and actions is God calling us **(our church or the community)** to have right now? Turn to your neighbor and brainstorm what are the issues God is calling us, Peace Lutheran Church, to address today?

As we, Peace Lutheran Church, continues to move into God's future, we can move forward knowing and trusting God's promise as it comes to us in Revelation. There is great tumult surrounding us and in the midst of that tribulation is God with us. **We are the church at work sharing the love of Jesus in the world, we are persecuted, protected and praising. In Jesus' love and forgiveness we grow, we serve, we love and are loved. God will always be faithful in God's promise to love and care for us.**

What the book of Revelation is saying is, there will be hard times of all kinds but in the midst of the struggle, not at the end once we endure but even in the suffering— is our God, with us, for us, placing the songs on our lips, teaching us to rejoice and singing with us. That is what it means to be church and that is **Good News**.