

Easter Sunday
Victory!

Sermon Text: Revelation 19:11-16

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, a man name Albert Pinkham Ryder created a painting called “The Race Track”. It currently hangs in Cleveland’s museum of Art. Its subtitle reads, “Death on a Pale Horse.” The painting depicts a race track of course. But notice that there is no race. In fact, the horseman is alone on the track. He wields a huge scythe. And notice also the direction that the horseman is facing. He is going clockwise—the wrong way.

What is this artist trying to depict? Well, the rider is no doubt death on a pale horse. And that rider is headed in the opposite direction that every other racer would travel. The fact, though, that he is alone on that track, would seem to me to say that he has been victorious. He has run towards and cut down every other rider on this race track. That pale rider, Death, is coming. He’s coming after me. He’s got our friends and family in his sights. And these days, it seems that everyone is afraid of even breathing the outside air, because Death, the pale rider, is floating by invisibly, or waiting patiently on every surface. This painting shows that death always wins in the end.

But let's go back to the picture from Revelation. The rider on a white horse is King of kings and Lord of lords. He strikes an impressive and fearful pose with blazing fire and sharp sword and he treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. All throughout Lent, we've been focusing on the spiritual warrior that Jesus is. Often times, and especially at the cross, he didn't look like some fierce fighter. But here now is the picture that we have been waiting for. Here now is the final image of Victory! Yes, today is a day to celebrate victory, even over Satan, even over death.

Look again: **“I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war.”** What a grand picture of Jesus! He is no longer a captive humiliated by soldiers. He is no longer beaten and whipped. His head is not bowed. His body is not in a grave. As St. Paul wrote—you can almost see him using all capital letters—**“Christ has indeed been raised from the dead” (1 Corinthians 15:20).**

But let's be clear. Jesus did die on Good Friday. He hung on a cross. He stopped breathing. His heart stopped beating. The brain stopped functioning. The professional killers pierced his side to make sure that he was dead. His body was locked up in a tomb. Jesus shed his blood all the way till day in order to say, “It is finished!”

But after Good Friday, it appeared as though death was still an enemy that we would lose to. I call death an enemy because it was never in God's plan for human beings to die. Death entered the world when sin entered the world. But if we were to say that on Good Friday Satan and sin were defeated, then we could say that on Easter, death, too, was defeated.

There is no doubt. The Bible lists over a dozen different appearances of the risen Jesus, including one time when there were five hundred people present. Most of the gospel accounts, including St. Paul's account of the resurrection, were written during the lifetime of thousands of people who were alive at the time of the first Easter. If it were not true, they would have said so and written so. Then Christianity would have

become just another fairy tale. If it had not happened, you would have expected books written by the Jewish leaders and the Romans that would have refuted the gospel accounts. But so many knew either from personal experience or from what they heard directly from people who had experienced it firsthand. Jesus actually rose miraculously from the grave.

The empty tomb of Jesus proves his words about death are true: **“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die” (John 11:25)**. That’s you and that’s me. Jesus conquered death and so then have we. Unless he comes back first, we must all face that pale rider, just as Jesus did, but only to one day open our eyes again and rise in glory. And what will we see?

John records, **“I saw [Jesus]...His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.**

This is the last picture of Jesus we have in the Bible. The Bible portrays Jesus as a loving shepherd. As a humble servant. As the Lamb of God. But this is the picture that we are left with. Why do you think God wanted to leave us with this image?

He carries a sharp sword. He has many crowns. He leads the armies of heaven. He rules with an iron scepter as he treads the winepress of God’s fury. And his robe is dipped in the blood of those he defeated – sin, death, and the devil.

Why such an image of anger and judgment? Well notice that little phrase in here that describes us. “The armies of heaven were following him,

riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.” Those with the rider are safe forever.

What happens when that pale rider comes for us? Well, because of Christ, at the moment of our death, the fear will be gone. The ugliness will be gone. The guilt and sin from the past are already gone. The hopelessness, the wondering—those last minutes before our souls leave our bodies will change from thoughts focused on this life to an inexpressible joy. The splendid and beautiful land of heaven will explode into view! Our souls will come into the welcome presence of this victorious warrior, this King and Lord over all.

This is picture of Jesus that God leaves us with. But listen to these words to see the picture of us that God leaves with. “They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

What a great day today is! What a victory! He is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.