Greetings!

The Revelation to John has always been a difficult book for preachers and scholars throughout time to interpret. While readers can usually track along with the first few chapters, which read a lot like other New Testament letters with encouragement and admonishment to seven early church congregations, it's not too long before most readers start to feel like someone put a little something extra in the thurible. So much of the book of Revelation is shrouded in imagery and language that takes cues from across the Bible. There's a significant amount of remixing and repurposing important aspects of the prophetic material Scholars of the Bible often call this kind of Biblical text "apocalyptic literature." For many modern ears, that term sounds really intense and that's because our use word of the word apocalyptic is pretty different from its original use. When we hear apocalyptic, we might think zombies, open mad max deserts, water worlds, and so on. But it used to refer to how some texts were a literal unveiling of God's mysteries, meant to reveal the nature of God's intentions and plans for his people Israel, like a literary peek behind the veil of heaven.

So yes, much of Revelation takes some intentional and prayerful study to rightly consider. But by the final chapter, what has been revealed to John actually becomes quite clear, quite beautiful. As John's vision begins to wind to a conclusion, there's an epic scale to the culmination of the Biblical story. John saw a glimpse of God's final vindication, God's ultimate victory in the Lamb that was slain who would reign on an eternal throne, an age to come where God and his people would finally be together forever. John would see a new heaven and a new earth; no longer separated by a spiritual barrier, no longer kept from the eyes of God's favorite creatures, humanity. John tells us that from the throne, a voice rang out to proclaim one of the most important, most stirring truths in all of the entire Bible, and certainly in his Revelation:

*See, the home of God is among mortals.*

*He will dwell with them as their God;*

*they will be his peoples,*

*and God himself will be with them*

I think that these four verses are among the most helpful texts to understand the entire Scripture, and certainly among the most encouraging for the heart of a Christian disciple. Even as the Revelation to John is filled with that prophetic imagery I mentioned a bit ago, our text today takes us all the way back to the beginning of the Bible, it takes all the way back to Genesis. It takes us right back to the garden in Eden where Adam and Eve enjoyed a close relationship with their Creator in the cool of the Holy Mountain. And even as that relationship is severely damaged by transgression, God still came to the garden to look for his son and daughter, still looked for a way to be with them.

If we read Scripture carefully, we find that God has always desired to be among us, even though we have been kind of scuzzy along the way. He made a covenant with a particular family and through them he would make his presence known on the earth. He made his ways known by way of covenants with folks like Noah and Abraham. After He rescued Israel from Egypt, He guided the hands of the artisans as they wandered in the desert so that they could construct a tabernacle. This was a tent set up to house God's presence, filled with symbols that would help ancient Israel understand that God was setting up a mobile Eden-ish kind of place where he would be with them, and they could be with him. Later, as Israel settled and became a kingdom, the Kings would make God a temple, and this temple would stand as a guarantee of God's desire to be among the people, to comfort them by his presence, and draw them closer to himself by nature of the forgiveness of sins by sacrifices on the altar.

But these were imperfect means all along; the covenants, the tent, even the temple, they were never enough to keep Israel on task so that they could make God's loving kindness known to all the world.

But then, Jesus came. The fullness of God dwelt among us. The living embodiment of God's teaching of love and mercy, the living temple of God's most holy and life-giving presence in the world. In his life, he comforted and healed, forgave sins, cast out the agents of darkness, and worked wonders to show the glory of God in this needful world. He opposed not only the oppression of Rome, but also the injustice in the hearts of his neighbors, and his victory would be over sin and death themselves. Even still, very God of very God dwelt among us and taught us how we can be like he is, how we can show the world around us that God loves us and means to be with us to wipe away our tears. He gave us a way to do it: he commanded us to love one another.

This command, when Jesus' disciples actually do it, is a means by which the promise of John's Revelation is made manifest even now. Our love for one another is meant to look like Jesus' love; he loves us a humble servant, he loves us sacrificially, he loves us selflessly. The New Testament is filled with examples of how this love is meant to look in Church communities: bearing with one another in our trials, being patient with one another, caring for the needy, being mindful of the weaker brother or sister when there's a difference of opinion, not showing partiality, and many more. When we love one another along those lines, our body becomes a yet more fitting dwelling place for the Most High God, and when we are drawn together in obedience to Christ's loving command, the gates of hell, the wages of sin and death itself don't have a chance against God's mighty power among his saints.

As your pastor, one of my favorite things about being among you is seeing how well you work together, how well you love each other as we enjoy our parish life. But being obedient to Christ's command to love one another like he loves us takes intention and care; we must always be present to the Holy Spirit in prayer so that we can be encouraged for the ministry ahead. My prayer is always that in our love, we would see that God is truly among us, that our friends, families, and neighbors would see that God is among us, and that by our growth in the presence of our teacher, Jesus, they would see that we are among those things that God is making new. As we all enjoy the presence of God's dwelling with us in the blessed sacrament, let us recall that in and through us, He means for Kings of the earth and all peoples, \*

princes and all rulers of the world;

Young men and maidens, \*

old and young together.

[to] praise the Name of the Lord, \*

for his Name only is exalted,

his splendor is over earth and heaven.

To the Risen Christ be all Glory. Amen.