

Saint Timothy Lutheran – Edmonds, WA

April 11, 2010 – Rev. Craig A. Patterson

“I Am Alive Forever.”

(Text: Revelation 1:4-18)

Context: The elderly Apostle John wrote this letter to seven congregations of believers who were being pressured to recant their faith in Jesus. They were located on the mainland, across from John’s living quarters on the island of Patmos, off the coast of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). Christians of this time period who lived under the influence of rule of Rome were being pressured to recant their faith and take up the practice of emperor worship. One commentator suggests that the Holy Spirit led John to write this epistle in a “veiled” manner so that the letter would be allowed to arrive at its destination. Since John was exiled on the isle of Patmos in a minimum security situation, every letter that he wrote would be read and censored before it was allowed to be sent. Apocalyptic (“veiled”) literature was written in a way that used symbols to communicate a more clear message to a certain audience. John’s message of correction and encouragement was very needed and was received to their benefit by the believers who have ever read it. Written sometime in the 90’s of the first century, believers had experienced terrible trials of all sorts.

I. John’s Circumstances Were Frightful And Disheartening, To Say The Least.

- A. John, the last living disciple of the twelve, was imprisoned on the island of Patmos.
 - 1. He was isolated from other believers.
 - a. He yearned to be free to proclaim and teach the glorious Good News of Jesus the Christ.
 - b. Yet, He knew that Jesus was with him and would use him in ministry, even in his jail cell.
 - 2. He was old and weak.
 - a. It was frustrating to know that fellow-believers in Christ were suffering and that he was, forcibly, detained and he could do nothing about his imprisonment.
 - b. He missed the fellowship of his fellow disciples.
 - c. At times, he must have felt forgotten and abandoned.
 - 3. He was frustrated in that he could not be with the believers to encourage them.
 - 4. He had a great message to share from the vision and the voice from behind him that told him to “Write into a book what you see...”
- B. Believers were being targeted and persecuted in severe ways.
 - 1. Persecution of the believers in Christ took many forms.
 - a. Christians were encouraged to recant their faith and to worship the emperor. (Imprisonment, torture, execution, etc.)
- C. Believers, today, face various forms of persecution and discouragement.
 - 1. As John’s vision was first intended for the seven congregations, today, we can, also, benefit from this same vision: The words of correction & the words of encouragement.
- D. As frightful as our circumstances can be, nothing is as frightful as to be in the presence of a holy and all-powerful God who sees everything and will judge all people!
 - 1. “And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man,” writes John. (1:17)

II. Jesus’ Victory Over Death, His Glory, And His Power Bring Encouragement, Hope, And Life To All Believers, No Matter Their Circumstances.

- A. This powerful and imposing figure said to John, “Do not be afraid;...” (1:17).
 - 1. This strong figure comes to be with us. He is on our side!
 - 2. The One who will judge all human souls is on our side!
- B. He further explains, “I am the first and the last,”” (All things begin and end with Him.)
 - 1. This Starter and Finisher of all things is on our side.
- C. He continues, “I am “the Living One; and I was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades” (1:18).
 - 1. Jesus has died and then risen from death.
 - 2. He now holds the “keys of death and Hades,” i.e. He controls the power of death. It does not control Him.
 - 3. He is alive forevermore, thus, His victory over death is permanent!
 - 4. The One who has the permanent victory over death is on our side!
- D. The same person, Jesus in all of His glory, who spoke to John speaks to us, “Don’t be afraid.”
 - 1. He tells us that our sins have been paid for, that He loves us, and He has all power. – Even as we face persecution, He tells us, “Do not be afraid.”