AllSaints

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REJOICE! A Wedding Invitation

Revelation 19:1-16

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Weddings! I love a wedding – I love dressing up and witnessing 2 people **declaring their love** to each other and entering into an **amazing covenant to love** each other, to share all that they have including their bodies with each other **exclusively and come what may to continue loving each other,** until death parts them! I also love the celebrating after, the feasting and dancing. It is such a special thing to witness and to welcome the birth of a new family into a community.

We know Jesus loved a wedding too as he performed his first miracle at the wedding in Cana in John 2 – turning water into wine to keep the party going – and perhaps a hint that one day wine would remind us of his blood – that would make way for the ultimate wedding invitation we hear about in today's reading.

Today's passage marks the beginning of the end of the book revelation – we have been on quite a journey in this amazing book together haven't we! Through this vision we have glimpsed into heaven and have seen various open doors of possibility.

Revelation 3:8

(NIVUK) 8 I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

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Revelation 3:20

(NIVUK) 20 I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

We have come to understand that this book is revealing to us things on multiple timelines and on multiple levels.

There have been a lot of 7's – letters to 7 churches, 7 seals, 7 angels, 7 trumpets and 7 bowls of wrath. We have been woken up to the battles that surround us - ones we can see and the spiritual battles we can't see!

The past few weeks we have been in quite dark and fearful chapters. We have been introduced to 4 horrible characters:

1. The Dragon,
2. The Beast of the Sea,
3. The Beast of the Earth (or, the false prophet) and…
4. "Babylon" personified as a female prostitute.

It is an amazing vision full of deep symbolism and as the living word of God it speaks of things that have happened and things that are happening and things that will happen all at once and it speaks deep truths into our lives in the here and now and great hope for the hereafter.

The title of Tom gave for today's sermon on Revelation chapter 19 is Rejoice! A wedding invitation! I would like to add the subtitle – **4 funerals and a wedding!**

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Because before we look in detail at the reading we had from chapter 19, I want to just recap on what happened in chapter 18 – because I think our rejoicing at the wedding will be so much greater if we remember what sorrow has gone before and what the happy couple have together overcome to get to this wedding day.

One way of reading Chap 18 – is that it is a funeral to the various forces of evil that God has killed through the blood of the lamb. These 4 forces of evil have been portrayed as the Dragon, the Beasts, The False Prophet and Babylon. These characters represent different aspects of evil in our world today. The Dragon we are told is Satan – the source of all chaos. The Beast of the sea represent the seemingly unconquerable powers of each age – for John they probably represented the Roman empire, for us there are many beastly forces at work –some are very obvious in our news – wars that rage around the world – others are harder to spot - our consumeristic society that harms the most vulnerable and destroys our beautiful planet, The evil powers behind human trafficking and the porn industry. These beasts are muti-headed, ugly, monstrous things because they represent – ugly, multi-faceted, monstrous things in the world.

The beast of the earth or the false prophet – in chap 13 – exists to make people worship the first beast – through lies and deception. It even looks a bit like a lamb – but it isn't the ultimate sacrificial lamb. – In our age this beast is most aggressively at work in the advertising industry – that push us to worship consumerism by making us constantly dissatisfied such that we yearn for more stuff. Through the weaponising of social media people are lost in echo chambers of despair – beastly evil things – but evil has only a limited time on the earth – that is the good news of these chapters.

From all 3 of these beasts we see frogs emerge representing lies and false words not of God – that come before the battle. Babylon represents the evil spirit that seduces us to want power, fame, lust, riches and pleasure – she is represented as an adulteress woman – dressed in purple and scarlet – (which has put me off my favourite colours!)

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The good news is that in chapter 18 we see the funeral of Babylon and the beasts – and read the eulogies of those who worshipped them –

Revelation 18:11

(NIVUK) 11 'The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more –

Revelation 18:18-19

(NIVUK) 18 When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, "Was there ever a city like this great city?" 19 They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out:

There will be a funeral for all 4 of these evil creatures – the Dragon, the Beast of the land and the beast of the sea and of Babylon – The good news is these 4 traitors do not win – this is very much a faithful victory! God, through the blood of the lamb – that is through God's one and only son Jesus Christ - defeats them all!

Back in chapter 13 and 14 there were 2 verses that stood out to me –

Revelation 13:10

(NIVUK) 10 This calls for <u>patient endurance</u> and faithfulness on the part of God's people.

Revelation 14:12

(NIVUK) 12 This calls for <u>patient endurance</u> on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.

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It was also there right at the start of the Book of Revelation:

Revelation 1:9

(NIVUK) 9 I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

And in the letter to the church in Philadelphia *we get a patient endurance promise from Jesus!*

Revelation 3:10

(NIVUK) 10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.

Those two verses are referring to us – we live in that in-between time between Christs death, resurrection and ascension and before his return – there are battles raging – the beasts are doing their worst because they know their time is short – but if we can patiently endure – remaining faithful – then there is a wedding invitation for us – to the supper of the wedding of the lamb and his church.

So now we look at today's passage – John sees heaven after the funeral for Babylon – and there is a great roar – a 3-fold Halleluiah from the crowd – as they realise they have just witnessed the defeat of the opposition – their team – team Christ has just scored in a big way…

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They yell:

1. Halleluiah – Salvation, glory and power belong to God

2. Halleluiah – smoke will rise from Babylon forever – just smoke – no life left in her!

3. Halleluiah – Lord God almighty reigns forever...

Then do you see it – we are not just invited to attend the wedding and enjoy the party – we are invited to the wedding as the Bride! - wearing white linen – bright and clean! - clothed in righteous acts!

Then there is a lovely moment where John gets it wrong and falls down at the feet of the angel that has shown him this in worship - and the angel rebukes him and says – Don't do that – worship God and only God!

I love that human response of John to his vision – and we must be wary of that too – it is easy to hear a great Christian speaker – at new Wine or somewhere and find ourselves worshiping them rather that worshiping the God they are trying to point us to.

Jesus uses a wedding feast as a parable in Matt 22:1-22, which has finally made sense to me – Jesus is waring us to be careful what we worship in this life and what we do.

In the parable Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven as being like a wedding banquet – to which the invited guests – all excuse themselves – to attend to a field or business or they act violently towards the servant with the invitation – they appear to be beast worshipers not God worshipers.

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So, the servants are sent again to fill the banquet with – whoever will come – and then at the feast the King – spots someone not in wedding clothes and throws him out of the feast – the parable ends "Many are invited but few are chosen" - that is the beautiful thing about a wedding – the couple have chosen each other, they are freely entering into the new covenant of marriage. There is also something significant about the wedding clothes – in the Rev passage today we are told they are prepared in white linen - this **represents the righteous acts of the people of God**. This is key – we cannot accept the invitation, be saved, become Christians and then live in an unrighteous – sinful way – because if we do, we won't have the right clothes for the wedding feast! – we will be thrown out – yikes!

Remember the other wedding related parable in Matt 25 v 1-13, of the wise and foolish bridesmaids – waiting for the bridegroom – and half of them run out of oil in their lamps – and miss the moment – **don't be unprepared for the wedding feast and the return of Christ – be constantly filling your lamps with oil – oil is a symbol of the holy spirit – be constantly worshiping and praying for a fresh filling of the holy sprit so you are ready.**

Then in verse 11 of Rev 19 this amazing glimpse into heaven – where we see Jesus as a conquering hero on a white horse, The Bridegroom has arrived!

We have seen a white horse before – in chapter 6 when the seals were broken – one of the 4 horsemen of the Apocalypse – the white one representing conquest of people – this one also represents conquest but this time of Good over Evil not evil over good – Because it is being ridden by Jesus – named as Faithful and truth, who rules with justice, and is crowned with many crowns, his robe is dipped in his own blood – rather than in the blood of those he has conquered, on his robe and thigh it was written King of kings and Lord of Lords.

In these words we see our bridegroom is the King of Kings – so this is a royal wedding invitation! We the church are a royal bride.

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There follows another battle – because remember in this vision we jump about in time and space – and the army of Jesus fight and detroy the beast, the false prophet, the kings of the earth and they are all killed – many by the sword coming from the mouth of Jesus – and their bodies are eaten by birds.

This final battle – is one for truth – the world has tried to win us over with so many lies – right from the beginning when the serpent said to Eve – did God really say...and here truth has the victory. What amazing power there is in the name of Jesus – and in the sword of the spirit – His word.

This wedding invitation is there to encourage us. How do we accept this wedding invitation?

We realise that through Jesus we are freed from our sins to follow him – we can profess faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God and through him we can enter into a new covenant relationship with God – (Just as a bride and groom exchange vows) one that must be exclusive – we must worship only God – with all that we have – because he will do the same for us – he will love, cherish and protect us with all that he has – and he is SO POWERFUL – he can defeat evil once and for all.

In this new covenant union with Christ as his Bride the church, we can be made new – a new family of God's people is born – a new thing is happening. What a fabulous wedding feast we have been invited to. Let us not waste our invite by being distracted by any beastly goings on around us. Let us not fail to be prepared and ready for the wedding – by ensuring our lamps are full of Holy Spirit oil, and our clothes of righteous acts are not soiled by unrepented sinfulness.

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As the Angel puts it:

Revelation 19:9

(NIVUK) 9 **Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!**

Rejoice – those that patiently endure as God's faithful people – because there is power – and glory in the name of Jesus!

Do you realise of the power of the sword of the spirit you have?

Do you realise the power of the name of Jesus Christ? It is immense power.

This is a marriage where not even death can part the couple.

Know this as you patiently endure - you are chosen, you are invited to the wedding feast as the royal bride, you are on the winning side of the final battle.

Hallelujah, Hallejuiah, Hallelujah – Our God reigns forever and ever. Amen!

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