

### 11.1.20 AllSts Blessing God and Called to be a Blessing for Others

- Unless you subscribe to extra premium TV channels, the regular television options each night keep repeating the same thing over and over again during this pandemic
  - It's amazing to me how the very same reruns of TV shows, and the how the constant recycling of the same movies, show up day after day, week after week
  - In fact, if you go channel surfing through the regular TV schedule, hardly a week goes by when one or all of the Star War movies is not available
  - How many times can you watch the same Star Wars movie?
  - Now despite all the amazing special effects and plot twists, there are three overarching themes that are common to ALL of the Star War movies
    - First, it's a dark time, because the evil imperial empire rules the universe
    - Second, there is a constant struggle between bad and good
    - And third, a small band of good people connect with *The Force* to combat, persevere, and eventually defeat the powers of the evil empire
- Now set that aside for a moment, and let's turn our attention to today's reading from the book of Revelation
  - And the first thing we have to do when it comes to any reading from Revelation, is let go of anything we may have absorbed from the *Left Behind* books and movies
    - That may be surprising to you, but despite their popularity, the whole *Left Behind* series some 20 or more years ago, pushed an interpretation that is outside the mainstream of 20 centuries of Christian teaching about Revelation
    - Specifically, we need to set aside and reject the popular idea that the biblical book of Revelation is some kind of hidden code that predicts a terrible tribulation that someday, or someday soon, will bring heavenly plagues upon the earth in order for God to save a few people from evil
  - Instead, the book of Revelation is not about an imminent, God-judging calamity poured out on earth, BUT

RATHER Revelation is about the struggle for EVERY generation of Christians to remain faithful during hardships, and to be faithful against the ways of the world

- The book of Revelation is about God giving hope, not destruction, to people who stay faithful, and the book of Revelation is not about God destroying the creation, but rather about God coming once again into creation to bring life and healing into the world
- When the book of Revelation was written, the Roman emperor ruled the lives of the early Christians as both a king and a god
  - In fact, one of the titles of the Roman emperor was the son of god, temples were erected to worship the living emperor, soldiers took an oath of obedience to follow the emperor as one of their gods, and Christians and Jews were tolerated only if they worshiped the emperor AND then worshiped the God of Israel and Jesus Christ.
  - Like the Star War films, there was an evil empire that controlled everything, there was a vast army that worshiped and enforced the power of the emperor, and there was a gospel writer named LUKE – not Luke Skywalker – Christian leaders like Luke, Matthew, Paul, and John of Revelation, who were empowered not by some nameless force, but inspired by the Holy Spirit of the Living Christ that called the early Christian church to resist by worshiping God, and loving their neighbors – even if their neighbors were Samaritans, or even worse – Romans
  - Christians were called to remain faithful in Revelation, by not worshiping worldly powers, but by worshiping the Lamb on the throne who was slain, and who has already defeated death, and therefore Rome’s claim to divinity, and every empire’s claim since then to be holy or heavenly, is already doomed to fail
  - AND THAT continued to be Revelation’s message to every generation up to and including today – our allegiance, our worship, is to the lamb who slain, but who lives and shelters us even now in the storms of both life and world.
  - As a contemporary Christian has written about the book of Revelation: “Believers who follow the Lamb know

that in the end the Lamb's way of suffering love will prevail. Evil will implode, and God will finally eliminate the rebellion that does not self-destruct. But in the meantime it will be a rough passage for Christians and others as the beast of empire goes through its death throes. Revelation counsels readers to brace for persecutions and to deepen their allegiance to the Lamb with... devotion."

[Apocalypse and Allegiance, Kraybill, pp. 108-109]

- Allegiance to Christ the Lamb who was slain and who has begun his reign – giving blessing and honor and glory to the crucified and risen Christ instead of to the principalities and powers of this world – honoring Christ, and resisting the values of the world that celebrate raw power, domination, and wealth, and instead, like in the beatitudes that we heard in the gospel for today, embracing the values of the Kingdom of God, like righteousness, and mercy, pure hearts and peacemaking, comforting the meek and feeling the poor – ALL THAT is our calling as sinners whom God has claimed and made saints not just in the future, but as forgiven, loved, and witnessing saints even now in the world
- So let us worship the Lamb who was slain and who has already begun his reign, and let us bless God, and live out the sainthood that we have been given so that we might bring the blessing of the kingdom of God to others.