

April 25, 2010  
Fourth Sunday of Easter  
Revelation 7:9-17; John 10:22-30

## ***JOURNEY TO THE CENTER***

Have a quirky question? Ask “The Straight Dope,” a question and answer column in our own Chicago Reader, yet syndicated nationally.

So ... *Dear Straight Dope: What's at the center of the earth? Molten lava? Rock? Hell? Someone told me no one knows for sure. Answer: Making vacation plans are we?*

Scientists would tell us to not believe Jules Verne and his science fiction classic, *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. The center of the earth is not a nice place to visit, unless you like hanging out in a blast furnace hotter than the surface of the sun! Actually, earth scientists believe there is a giant crystal buried at the center of the earth.

What if we graphed our life in a large circle, with icons—symbols—for all the people and things and places we love. What would be at the center? What gives us joy? Where we do invest our time, our money, our energy? What is most important to us? What or whom do we worship? What is at our center?

What if a visitor from outer space attended our Easter Day service when there were over 350 people here? What would have seemed at the center? The flowers? The great music? The preacher's sermon? All the children? What is at the center of this community's worship and its life together? What message? What mission?

During these weeks of Easter our second readings are from the mysterious book of Revelation. Some Christians consider Revelation a blueprint for the future, and a terrifying one at that. They believe God will destroy the earth and that believers are destined for a journey, a rapture out of the earth.

There is a book called “Secrets of the Code,” which unlocks the symbolism in the novel *The DaVinci Code*. When scholars help us dig deeper into the book of Revelation, understand its context and “unlock” its deeper meanings, we are led not to some distant heaven or future cosmic battle, but to the center of life in this very world.

Certainly Revelation is a vision of heaven. But that vision gave hope for those living through persecution and struggle in the late first century. And the vision can speak powerfully to our lives in this world as well.

What is at the core of Revelation? What is at the center? Our reading today gives us several answers.

The spectacular, apocalyptic journey in revelation takes us to the center of heaven, the city of God. And what's there? One seated on the throne. And the Lamb! The lamb is on our lips in every Sunday liturgy. *Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world. Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain.*

I don't know if we grasp how radical are these words about the Lamb. John, the writer of Revelation was contrasting the Jesus the Lamb with the power of the Roman empire. Such power was displayed in military might, in dominance, in oppression, in brutal destruction of its enemies.

To be followers of the Lamb, to worship the Lamb, turned this world of violence upside down. Jesus is the victim. He is the wounded one. He is the suffering servant. It is simply mind-blowing. God's power is made known in weakness. At the center of God's love is suffering and vulnerability. A mystery we express when we bow, when we bend our bodies, toward the center of our faith, the cross.

And there's more. At the center of Revelation--at the core of our week as well--is worship. The angels and saints gather around the Lamb. And this is the song: *Blessing and honor and glory and might be to God and the Lamb forever.* Words of a heavenly vision. Words at the center of our Easter feast as well!

Singers and instrumentalists from our congregation will present Handel's *Messiah* on Sunday, May 23. Two classic texts from Revelation are at the core of the work: The Hallelujah Chorus, immensely popular, and the very last piece, which begins, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain... to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing." Mark the concert on your calendar. And stay after worship today for our food4thought meal and to learn some cool things about this most amazing musical work!

We gather each Sunday to learn this language of worship. To learn how to listen for the Shepherd's voice. It doesn't seem very natural, at times. It would be easier to complain or lament. It seems more natural to put ourselves at the center of the universe.

In other words, we become what we worship. A book called *How God Changes Your Brain* makes this point. If you believe in a God of comfort and security (*The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not be in want*) then your life takes on this energy. If you believe in an angry, judgmental and vindictive God who justifies harming other people, then that's what motivates your worldview. That's what you become.

If you worship the power of empire, that is what you will become. But to worship the Lamb? To find victory in weakness and surrender? To discover the center of love in suffering and vulnerability? It's hard to wrap our minds around. No wonder our faith is a mystery.

The events of 9-11 took place a few blocks from an Episcopal Seminary. After experiencing those present-day apocalyptic events the seminary president is convinced that the center of Revelation is what he calls "Lamb Power." Lamb power is vulnerable, yet strong, and can change the world. Lamb Power is the power of nonviolent resistance and courage in opposition to injustice. It is the power of solidarity and forgiveness. In all things large and small, personal and political, the power of vulnerable love—Lamb Power--can bring healing.

No wonder the day after the Berlin Wall came down a Methodist church in Prague put up this sign: The Lamb Wins! A writer added: not the bear, not the lion, not the tiger. But the Lamb. The Lamb wins.

Do you realize how strange this is? The victim is the victor. The crucified One is risen. The wounded lamb is our shepherd.

*Dear Straight Dope: If you become what you worship, what will become of us if each Sunday we journey to the center of heaven. And ascribe honor and blessing, power and might ... to the Lamb?*