

Revelation 7:9-17, 19:5-9
The Wedding Feast of the Lamb
Sunday October 4th, 2015

I recently got a Facebook wedding invitation for this beautiful young couple: Darlene Logston and Cameron Bonner.



Darlene is the daughter of two United Methodist ministers and Cameron is a United Methodist from Wilcox. Darlene came to Christ Church while serving in Tucson as a US2 missionary. Cameron came to Christ Church because years ago when his dad was in the air force he attended Christ Church and found his bride there. He suggested the same for Cameron. It worked!

Cameron attended and I invited them to a community Young Adult Bible study I lead on Saturday nights. They came, they saw, they fell in love. January 1st is the big day!

Invitations to weddings come a little bit differently today than when I got married and I suspect when you got married. They used to be on fancy paper with fancy lettering like on the cover of our bulletin. Now you get a picture from Evite and underneath are buttons to click that say either "Going", "Maybe" "Sorry".

Now today is World Communion Sunday and I thought about the multitudes of people around the world receiving Holy Communion and invitations. The invitation that is used for Holy Communion is,

"Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another."

And today we all received an invitation to attend the Wedding

Feast of the Lamb. It's in fancy lettering on fancy paper in our Bibles and is Rev. 19:9 "*Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!*" Our invitation comes through hearing the word.

In verse 7:9 it speaks of "*...a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language,...*" Today there is a multitude of people around the world receiving communion in every time zone, every continent and most countries, even countries where our faith is suppressed.

And I remembered. I remembered that Holy Communion reminds us of three things. I like to call them 3 tenses of memory in Holy Communion.

It reminds us of what Christ has done for us in the past, "On the night in which Jesus was betrayed, he took bread broke the bread and said, "This is my body given for you...."

It reminds us of what Christ is doing for us in the present, "If you confess with your mouth and believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord you will be saved."

It reminds us, especially today of what Christ is preparing for us in the future. It is the Wedding Feast of the Lamb and you are invited!!

These two short scriptures are full of images, oxymorons, (Like blood that washes robes white, a Lamb that is a Shepherd.) to express something: a vision, a hope, a future reality that is beyond verbal description. It is the wedding feast of The Lamb who is marrying His bride The Church.

The setting is the Heavenly Throne room in which victorious worship begins by a great multitude of people that no one can count from "**EVERY nation, tribe, people and language**". It's

World Wide Communion Sunday in Heaven. It's a very challenging scripture for those who want to pull the circle of the saved small for it says "every" in our translation and "all" in others. It reflects the thinking of Jesus when he said, "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, 'Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven." Matt. 7:21

This is the multitude that has died witnessing for God, New and Old Testament prophets and saints.

It is those who when under pressure to conform to the world resisted. These are the ones who lived through the battle by dying faithfully in the battle. Who prayed "Lead us not into hard testing or a time of trial" and God said,"No"! But God answered their prayer "but deliver us from the evil one", they did not deny who and whose they were! They belonged to the Lamb. They weren't given an easy life and faith to practice.

They suffered for their beliefs. They went through tribulation: maybe not "The Tribulation" but tribulation. Life was not easy nor death pleasant because they practiced their faith. When asked if they were a Christian they said yes!

But they arrived in the throne room of heaven not tattered, torn, bloodied and beaten up, but victorious!!

The white robes and palm branches are symbols of victory and they shouted triumphantly "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." Rev. 7:10

The multitude is the Martyrs. The word "martyr" comes from the ancient Greek word for "witness". A martyr was someone who witnessed to their faith with their very lives. They refused to conform to the demands of their culture and compromise their faith. They underwent imprisonment, torture

and death for Jesus. Today, believe it or not, but around 100,000 Christians are martyred for their faith every year. 9 more fell in Oregon this week. When faced with an evil madman they did not deny their faith. They said, “Yes”!



A few months ago we saw pictures of Coptic Christians murdered in fact martyred for their faith. These were common laborers, desperate people living on the edge of poverty who had left Egypt to go to Libya for work. They would have been encouraged more than we have been for the hope that was written in these verses.

They were promised that “Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat.” “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

What hope and peace is promised here to common laborers living out their days in poverty in the scorching Mediterranean sun.

Islam was born in utter conflict with Christianity. You can see it in their teachings and read it in the history books. In college I worked with a Muslim woman and of course I had to talk with her about religion. We only had one conversation because here is how it began and ended. She said to me, “The first thing we ever teach our children is that God cannot become man and man cannot become God.”

It was born in utter conflict to our faith. For quite a few centuries it overcame that conflict but Radical Islamists have drug their faith back centuries in time. For hundreds of years they

lived in relative peace with other faiths in the middle-east until very recently in time.

One of the survey suggestions was I do a sermon or a series on Islam. Well I don't think that would work well in a sermon series and would most properly be addressed in a classroom setting, but I would say this. It is more important that we know what we believe and live it out than what others do.

Islam was born in utter conflict to Christianity and grew through military conquest, but it was also fueled by the corruption of the Christian Church in the lands they went through that had conformed to the world of that day.

What is more important for us to do is to tend to our own personal witness and the witness of our faith here in the area in which we live. Let us not conform to the world but witness to the world in gracious words and righteous deeds.

This begins to be addressed by the first oxymoron we saw, "they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." We have been made clean by the blood of the Lamb, let's stay that way. Riddle, what can be washed in blood and come out clean? Answer, only humans. And verse 19:8 "Fine linen, bright and clean, was given to her to wear. (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.)"

These two verses together remind us that we need to be active in our faith. This multitude standing in the throne room of heaven was martyred, not because they were invisible in their societies, but because they stood out by doing the will of God. The good works we do, the righteous acts, the mission we undertake on behalf of others says much to the world and this scripture promises will cloth us on high.

The onslaught of Radical Islam will not be stopped by violence alone, but when Christians boldly show the freedom and the equality that comes from being a believer. We must be bolder in our acts of faith and bringing life and freedom to the world than Radical Islam brings death and submission.

I believe that God is calling us to a new radicalism in the Christian faith, not one of guns and violence, but of radical lives lived out in grace and service to others. Jesus said we need to pick up our cross daily, which means every day we are all in for God. Every day we die by putting all we own, all we are, all we have been and all we will be in the service God.

We put our whole being in the service of God and others. We don't go out as a martyr all at once and die suddenly for God. We die daily, moment by moment, by choosing God's will over our own. And as we do, God's kingdom will come God's will, will be done on earth as it is in heaven. But we need to be all in, totally committed and by this dying daily for God.

Can you imagine being in that classroom in Oregon after one or two or three are murdered for saying, "yes you are a Christian" and it's your turn? What courage, what a witness for those others who were there and we who hear today and all around the world.

Our witness has and always will cost us blood. It will add to that great multitude we read about surrounding the throne of God in heaven. But it is the faithful way forward.

Will we be more radically committed to service, love, and freedom than those who are committed to death and destruction? That is today's question.

Remember now as we take Holy Communion what Christ has done for us in the past, what Christ calls us to do in the

present and our future hope. “For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Tables are up in the back for the memorial this afternoon, but also as a reminder of our hope, the Wedding Feast of the Lamb for the martyrs the witnesses who have overcome the world. And this we remember as we receive communion, a meal that is but a shadow, a foretaste of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb.

With all of our body and senses let us now worship God in Holy Communion with our brothers and sisters around the world. Actively come forward as you are able. Passively receive the gift with hands crossed and open to receive. And remember your victory to come.

In Jesus' name amen!!