

... To you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. You may be seated. So today in our readings, we continue with the reading from the Book of Revelation. This time, the entire last chapter of the Book of Revelation. This is the last word that God gives to his people. This is what God wants us to hold fast to as we wait for his second coming, as we anticipate the coming again. And you can see why they placed it right here. He is ascended into Heaven this Thursday before. And now we read of what is going to happen next, of what we are looking forward to. And so we have John promising this River of Life that feeds the Tree of Life from which we take our fruit and the water that we wash our robes in. The water that nourishes us, that sustains us.

And of course, we cannot think of water in our context unless we think of baptism and we have a hinting of that or at least an implication of that when we read about, did you notice that we walk around with the name of Christ upon our foreheads? We have his name written across our foreheads. Now you can look in the mirror and I trust me, you're never going to see it, but it's still there nonetheless. You are marked with a sign, a sign of Christ. Now, when we get into the Book of Revelation and we talk about a mark upon our foreheads, most people are going to go to the mark of the beast, the number 666 and all of that, and everything that represents. That is not this mark. In fact, for the sake of the mark of Christ upon your forehead, you do not need to fear the mark of the beast because you are one redeemed by Christ, claimed as his child, adopted, adopted as a son and daughter of God.

That is the name that is upon your forehead. See, here in this world, when you adopt a child, you get a piece of paper. And when the judge signs that paper and the state gives its seal, it is official. That seal marks you as a new person. In fact, you get a new birth certificate with your new name upon it, the name of your parents. And it is the same thing that happens in our baptism. We are marked, that's the seal not of our state, of our government, but a seal of God in baptism. And we are adopted and we are given a new name, a name of Christian, a name of son and daughter of God. And because of that, because of that, we know that when Christ comes again, we will be with him.

But we are called to hold fast to every word that he speaks. He is the Alpha and the Omega. How did he describe? He's the root of David as well as the descendant. The one who has come before who is eternal, is with us and has called us and has adopted us and has told us, "Listen to my word. Do not take away from it. Do not add to it because you are now my disciples. You are now called to be my witnesses in this world." And that's what Jesus is praying about this in John 17, that's a high priestly prayer as he prays for his people, for his disciples, that they might be one,

that they might give glory to God and praise his name and might be that witness into the world.

Now unfortunately, as we look around the world, we see a bunch of different denominations. We see fracturing of the Christian faith, at least in its outward appearance. Unfortunately, we are not united in every aspect of the Word of God, but we are still a united church, an invisible church that nobody can see, just like the mark upon your forehead. In fact, that is the mark that claims you as part of the church. You see, we may not see it, but there is still unity in the Christian faith because the Christian faith is centered upon the one thing that will save us: Christ crucified. Because of his death we are forgiven of our sins. Because of his death we have the promise of everlasting life. And the proof of that is through his resurrection and ascension.

But if you listened, when I gave the absolution or when I encouraged you in the absolution, it says that God gave his son to die for us that our sins might be forgiven. See, we are united. The church is one in the confidence that Christ died for us. And because he died for us, we hold fast to him and his word and his promises. Because that is what sustains us. That is what gives us life. And it wasn't the water that saved you and the water didn't just remove a little bit of dirt. But the water connected to the word of God has the power to give you a new name, has the power to mark you as his child. And now we are called therefore to be faithful witnesses to that calling.

He gave us these final words in Revelation. He gave us these final words so that we might be confident that we serve the God of the Universe who has authority over all things, including death itself. And so he calls us to be righteous. He calls us to walk in peace with one another. To love each other and not practice falsehood or sexual immorality or murder or adultery or anything else, but to hold fast to his promises. Because he calls us and invites us to be confident. To be confident that no matter what befalls us, and if you read the rest of the Book of Revelation, you know there are sections of the book of Revelation which sound pretty awful and they're pretty scary.

And there will be trials and tribulations in this world and there is going to be opportunities for you to be scared. However, that is why we hold fast to the word. That is why we gather together to hear the word, so that in the midst of the trials, in the midst of the tribulation, and we are indeed in the tribulation, we are in the last days and we have been since Christ ascended into the heavens. That was the beginning of the last days and the end is when he descends again. We are in the midst of it and have been our entire lives.

But the Book of Revelation is not about being afraid of the last days or being afraid of the tribulation. Rather Revelation in the entire book of Scripture is about

offering us peace and hope and confidence and comfort. We're just reading in our Bible class in Hebrews about that God is for us and what can man do to us? God is our helper. He is our protector. He is the author and perfecter of our faith. He has done it all. We are secure that name that we have received, the baptism that we have been given, the Word of God that holds us in his power, the Holy Spirit, which has been given for us to live this life, is secure in Christ through his death and resurrection and ascension.

And because we are secure, because we know that man cannot do anything to us, we have peace. As Jesus said, just last week we read in the Gospel, "I say these things to you that you might have peace. For in this world you will have tribulation. But take heart, I have overcome the world." He overcame the world. He overcame death. He overcame Satan. He overcame sin. If he has done that, why be afraid? There's nothing, nothing that can take us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. And so therefore, we can be bold in our proclamation to a world as he says in the book of Revelation, the Spirit and the Bride say, "Come and let who hears, the one who hears, say come, and let the thirsty come."

That is our great commission right there. We are the Bride of Christ. The Church is the Bride of Christ, and the bride is saying to the rest of the world, "Come. Be washed in the waters of baptism. Be washed in the blood of Christ. Receive the name of Christ upon your forehead, that you might know the peace that we have." And so we say come in our actions, in our words, in our thoughts, by loving one another, by caring for one another, by doing everything unto the glory of God, by serving him and serving our neighbor. We invite everybody to come and eat the Fruit of Life, which is his gift given to us. Because there is nothing more valuable than that gift. So while we deal with the tribulations of this world, we can sit and be at peace knowing that he's going to come quickly. And that is our prayer. Come quickly, Lord Jesus, come quickly.

May his grace and his mercy and his peace be and abide with you always now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen.