

Higher Things Pre-conference Evening Prayer

July 24, 2023

Scripture: Daniel 7:1-13 and Revelation 1

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

This chapel will be full tomorrow. I am very much looking forward to that! But who will be here? Who will be in this crowd from many states and ages and races and abilities, standing before the Lamb and singing?

It will be people struggling with sin. Youth who come from broken homes and maybe fighting parents and feeling guilty because they think it's because of them and they are dreading going back. There will be more than a few who are struggling with sexual sins and urges and who are ashamed. Some maybe struggling with their bodies, if they have the right one, if they look the right way. Some who are wondering about their future and what that looks like. Some who try their best but their best isn't good enough, and one more harsh word, one more criticism may just send them over the edge. There may be some who have thought of suicide. There may be some who so filled with fear had an abortion. And there will be many who look like they have it all together on the outside, but inside, not so much. And some, perhaps many, filled, yes, **with doubt**.

But not just tomorrow. This chapel is already filled with people like that, in the pews and the pulpit. I may not know what your struggle is, what shame you carry, what fears you can't shake, your doubt. But I know it's there. As much as in my heart, too. And it can be terrifying.

**But there's someone else here as well, in this chapel.** The one who knows all this. The one who knows what we try so hard to hide. The one who is here not in spite of who we are, condescending to be here among us - but the one who is here *because* of who we are, *wanting* to be here *with you* because He loves you. Just as He came to be with the demon-possessed and unclean, the hated and the notorious sinners, the struggling and ashamed. **He still is.** Because He wants you to hear one thing. He wants to speak to your trembling, shame-filled, anxious, doubting heart, one thing. To all the beastly sins tormenting you, to all the proud and boastful horns accusing you, the one who comes with angels and

archangels and all the company of heaven is here to say to you: **I forgive you.** That you know *Beyond Reasonable Doubt*, beyond any doubt, that He is here *for you.*

Because look! *Behold* is the biblical word - *behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.* And if the sin of the *world*, then your sin, your shame, your guilt. None too little, none too big. Daniel and John, as we heard tonight, saw the one whose clothing and hair was white as snow, whose eyes were like a flame of fire, whose voice was like the roar of many waters, whose face was like the sun. **That's the one we see, too!** That one, in our human flesh, whose crown is of thorns, whose hands and feet are pierced, whose voice, though dry and cracked, says: *Father, forgive them. And you are.* As are all who will fill this chapel tomorrow. Whatever you come here with, He takes, all your sin and shame. And what He comes here with, He gives to you - His washing, His absolution, His Body and Blood. Because the book that is opened here is not a book of judgment, but a book of Gospel. That you hear and know that Jesus is *for you.* That everything He is and everything He does is *for you.*

So on the cross He hung for you and all those sins of yours, to die for them *for you*, to die with them *for you*, and to rise *without* them *for you.* To say to you as we heard tonight: ***Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.*** And that key is here for you. For *the Office of the Keys is that special authority that Christ has given to His church on earth to forgive the sins of repentant sinners.* To set you free from hearts so filled with sin and guilt and shame, with fears and doubts, by an empty tomb, so filled with truth and grace and hope.

So we bless and consecrate this chapel tonight for this: that when that great crowd gathers here tomorrow and all this week, around the Lamb who was slain but ***is alive forevermore***, we receive life through His Word and leave not unchanged. We will still struggle with sin, we will still be under the assault of evil beasts seeking to bite and devour us, we will still have questions. Such is life in a sinful world and in our sinful flesh. But ***fear not***, our Lord says to us as to John. You are not alone. Wherever you are, I have been, and whatever you need,

I provide. Forgiveness for your sin, peace for your heart, and food for body and soul. That you live and know, *Beyond Reasonable Doubt*, that I am yours and you are mine. Now and forever.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.