

Easter 1 / April 27, 2025

Revelation 1:18

“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.”

Jesus Holds the Keys of Death and Hades

Our epistle readings the Sundays of Easter come from the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which He gave John to show His servants the things that will happen in the future, pertaining to the salvation He won for us with His cross and through His empty tomb; which we will receive in its fullness, when He returns in glory and makes us and all things new. Almost every book in the Hebrew Bible is alluded to, or referenced in some way, in the book of Revelation. Revelation is a condensed version of the bible. It's a synopsis of scripture showing God's control over creation, including the forces that oppose Him. It shows God's wrath at sin. The appeasement of His wrath through the sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of our salvation. It shows God's gracious offer of salvation through faith in Christ. It is written for the same purpose as John's gospel that we would believe Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and have life in His Name. The Spirit calls us to believe in Him!

Revelation was not written so we would discern the day and hour of Christ's return. It was written so we would know that even though we do not see Him with our eyes that Christ is with us through His word and by His Spirit. It was written so we would know that in all things God accomplishes His good in the life of the church and in the lives of believers. It is given to empower our faith so we would not be discouraged by the tribulations of life, or be led away from faith by the world, the devil and our sinful nature. It is written so that we would believe Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and have life in His name in time and for eternity. Some people experience Revelation as a frightening book. It wasn't written to scare us. It was written to assure us of our salvation and of God's power to accomplish His good in the life of the world and the lives of those who believe. Jesus, the all-powerful God, and Saviour of those who believe, holds in His hands both the keys of death and hades and those the Father has given Him. No one is able to snatch us from His hand.

Revelation opens with Jesus appearing in His glory as the Eternal Son of God. The hairs of His head white like wool. His eyes flashing like a flame of fire. His feet glowing like burnished bronze. His voice like the roar of the ocean. His face shining

like the sun in full strength. What would you think if you saw something like that? What would those who condemned and crucified Him have thought, if they had seen Him like that? Pontius Pilate would have sung a different tune if after he mockingly said, *“So you are a king,”* Jesus had suddenly made His divinity visible. I wonder how Annas and Caiaphas the high priests and their courtiers would have felt, if Jesus had come down from the cross in appearance as the Son of God, after they had mocked Him, spit on Him and said, *“If He is God’s Son let Him come down from the cross now that we may believe in Him?”* There would have been no need for faith if had shown Himself to them with eyes glowing, legs gleaming, face beaming, but that’s not the way God wants us to believe. God wants us to see Jesus first through faith.

Jesus didn’t show Himself in the fulness of His glory during His earthly sojourn, because such a manifestation of divine glory would have terrified everyone. They would have fled from Him in fear. Even John, ‘the beloved disciple’, fell down as if dead when Jesus appeared to him in His glory. Secondly, and most importantly, Jesus wants us to see Him through the humility of faith and believe in Him through the witness of the Spirit in the word. These things are written that we would believe. God wants us to believe through the witness of the word. The Holy Spirit prepares us to see Jesus in His glory through the word of the gospel, the water of baptism, the bread and wine of holy communion. We see Jesus first through faith. We will see Jesus in His glory at His appearing.

Peter, James and John were fishing when Jesus called them to follow Him. They dropped their nets, left everything and followed Him. Why did they follow Him spontaneously and immediately? Not because His face shone like the sun. If they had seen Him like that they probably would have jumped into the water and hid in the sea. They followed because of the power of His word. Through the word, the Holy Spirit opened their hearts to believe and gave them faith to see something remarkable about this man, beneath His humble appearance. The Holy Spirit gave them ears to listen, hearts to believe and opened their eyes to see that this man is indeed the Saviour who has come into the world and that He has the words of eternal life. Through the word the Holy Spirit opens our ears to listen, our hearts to believe, our eyes to see and our mouths to confess Jesus Christ as our God and Saviour. These things are written that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, have life in His Name and be sustained in faith until faith passes into sight at His revelation at the end of the age.

God wants us to see Jesus through faith in the words of scripture. God values faith above all else. Abraham believed God and God counted it to him as righteousness. Thomas refused to believe until he had seen. Jesus said, *"Blessed are those who have not seen, yet have believed."* Peter, James and John caught a glimpse of Jesus' glory when His face shone and His body radiated divine light on the Mount of Transfiguration. The divine voice said, "This is my beloved Son, listen to Him." They didn't understand what they had seen, but they knew they needed to listen to Him. John saw Jesus through faith in His words for many years. His faith had matured so that now He was prepared to see Him in His glory. The Holy Spirit shows us Jesus in the word so that having seen Him first through faith, we are prepared to see Him in the fullness of His glory at His appearing.

Jesus' divine glory terrified John. But Jesus didn't appear to John in His glory to terrify Him. He appeared in His glory to assure John and believers through the ages, of His power to save those whom He holds in the palm of His hand. John was overwhelmed by the glory he beheld. He says, *"When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead."* When God gave the law to Israel at Mount Sinai the people were terrified. They begged Moses to speak to them and not God. They were terrified because they saw their sinfulness illuminated in the light of God's glory. Moses gave the law to reveal God's glory and illuminate human sin. John said in his gospel, *"The law came through Moses. Grace and truth come through Jesus Christ."* Jesus put his hand on John's shoulder and said *"Don't be afraid."* When we see Jesus our Saviour in the gospel of forgiveness, we see we have nothing to fear.

John was overwhelmed by the glory, but he was not afraid. What did have to fear? Jesus was his God and Saviour. Jesus atoned for His sin and the sin of the world on the cross. Jesus showed His power over death and hades by rising on the third day. Jesus was on John's side. Jesus is on our side. If Jesus is on our side, who can stand against us? Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Everyone who believes in Him will live, even though they die. He lay down His life for our sins and took it up again for our salvation. We have nothing to fear with Him in our hearts and at work in our lives.

Jesus shows His power to His church in Revelation not to make us afraid, but to assure us of His love, His power to accomplish His will in the world and in our lives and His power to save those who believe in Him as their God and Saviour. John was an enemy of the Roman State, the most powerful empire on earth. John saw that Rome was nothing compared to Jesus. John knew that no matter what was against

Him, nothing was as strong as Jesus. Jesus was with Him as His God and Saviour! Jesus is with us as our God and Saviour! No matter what is against us, nothing is as strong as Jesus. Jesus is with us through the Spirit, who comes to us in the word and through the sacraments and who dwells within and among us. Nothing in life is more important than Jesus. He is our God and Saviour. He holds the keys of death and Hades in one hand. He holds us and all believers in the other. Nothing is able to snatch us from His hand. God strengthen our faith and preserve us in His grace to the day of Jesus Christ and the revelation of His glory. In Jesus' Name. Amen