

Mother's Day

This past week, the eyes of the world turned again toward Rome. With white smoke rising from the Sistine Chapel chimney, we witnessed once again the ancient ritual that elects a new pope, the spiritual leader of over a billion Roman Catholics. In that moment, amid incense and bells, chants and prayers, people looked for a sign of renewal, leadership, and holiness. And yet, far removed from the pageantry of Vatican City, we also celebrate something just as personal today, though much quieter – Mother's Day. In homes and churches, in memories and embraces, we honor mothers and mother-figures – those who have loved, nurtured, and wiped our tears.

These two events may seem worlds apart. But they both reflect the yearning for love, guidance, and grace that finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Humanity has a deep thirst for something eternal, for peace, for comfort, and for belonging. Our Scripture from Revelation offers a glimpse of that fulfillment – a multitude from every nation gathered before the throne, led by the Lamb, and drinking deeply from springs of living water.

In the Scripture we find a vision of heaven, and also of the on-going work of God's grace. Grace that meets us, transforms us, and ultimately carries us home. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, taught that God's grace is not only pardon for sin, but also power to live in holiness. It's a grace that moves us from sin to salvation, and from salvation to sanctification.

Prevenient Grace

John records:

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb," (Rev. 7:9-10).

This is a vision of radical inclusion and belonging. It echoes John Wesley's understanding of prevenient grace – the grace that goes before, reaching all people everywhere, drawing them toward salvation. What a powerful reminder on this day, when we consider the world-wide body of Christ. The Church isn't confined to any one nation, race, or tradition. No one is outside the reach of God's love. Just as the new pope has been called to serve a diverse, world-wide church, so too are we reminded that God's grace extends to every tribe, tongue, and nation, preparing hearts to receive Christ. It shows us that God is building a kingdom that crosses all boundaries.

Doesn't this, too, sound like the work of a mother? To gather her children, to reconcile the broken relationships, to comfort every child regardless of where they came from or how far they've wandered? In many ways, this image of the whole Church surrounding the throne is also an image of the family of God – a household with room for all people, bound not by bloodlines and genetics – but by the blood of the Lamb – His love poured out for them, and for us, and for all people.

John goes on:

All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" (verses 11-12).

Washed in the Blood

It's a beautiful vision of the whole creation praising our creating, sustaining, and redeeming God! One of the elders asks John, "These in white robes – who are they, and where did they come from?" (verse 13). John doesn't know. So the elder tells him, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," (verse 14).

Some Bible versions replace the phrase "great tribulation" there with "hardship." It's open to interpretation. Some Bible scholars view it as the hostility toward the Church at the end of the age. Others view it as on-going hostility towards the Church throughout the ages – and John would have experienced this while in the mines on Patmos.

One thing to really notice here, though, is about the saints who washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, and made them white! Seems counter-intuitive, doesn't it? Usually blood stains fabric. In Eighth Grade, my classmates and I went on a trip to Washington, DC. As part of that trip, they took us to Ford's Theater, where President Lincoln was assassinated. After showing us where he was shot, they took us across the street to Petersen House, where he later died. That room has been painstakingly preserved. Even today, Lincoln's blood stains the pillowcase on the bed where he died.

The blood of the Lamb washes the robes – and let's be clear – it washes the saints clean. These saints have been through suffering – the great tribulation, hardships, woes. They've not come to the throne by avoiding pain, but by passing through it. Suffering isn't the end of the story. Pain doesn't get to have the final word.

Made New with Justifying Grace

This is a word of comfort, especially on Mother's Day. While we celebrate, some carry grief. Mothers who have lost children. Children who have lost mothers. Women

who longed for children but never had them. Relationships strained or broken. The “great tribulation” isn’t just a far-off persecution. It includes the long nights of rocking feverish babies, the quiet tears shed over children making hard choices, the anxiety of a mom wondering how she’s going to feed her family, or the pain of being forgotten.

And yet, the Scripture reminds us that suffering can be transformed. The Lamb redeems it. The white robes have become white because they’ve been transformed by the blood of Jesus Christ. His love rewrites our pain and hardships into praise. This is justifying grace. John Wesley describes it as the moment when we’re reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ. It’s not by our own merit, but by the righteousness of Christ that we’re made clean.

This is the heart of the Gospel. Forgiveness, reconciliation, and the gift of new life. And it’s free, and available to all people – whether a pope in St. Peter’s Basilica, a mom praying beside a crib, or a weary soul burdened by sin. God meets us in our troubles and tribulation – in our valleys – and He offers us relief and redemption.

Shelter, Provision, Growth, and Sanctifying Grace

“They are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will shelter them with His presence. ‘Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,’ nor any scorching heat,” (verses 15-16). What a great promise! It touches on something deeply human – we long for safety and rest. We want food that satisfies. For a shelter from the storms of life.

Wesley also taught that God’s grace doesn’t stop at forgiveness. Through sanctifying grace, God continues to work in us, making us holy in heart and life. The people before the throne have been saved, and also made new. Their lives have been shaped by the on-going work of the Holy Spirit. According to Wesley, we’re called to go on to perfection – not flawlessness, but perfect love – love of God and love of neighbor.

Mothers have often been the human embodiment of this sanctifying love in their patient, sacrificial care. Many of us can remember a time when we were scared or sick, and it was our mother’s voice, or her hand on our forehead that brought comfort. It was at her table where we were fed. In her presence, we found shelter. But as much as human mothers strive, even their love has limits. The Scripture points us to the divine heart of God – who like a mother, gathers us under God’s wings like a hen gathers her chicks, and feeds the hungry with good things. Because of Jesus, we are sheltered in the shadow of the Almighty.

As the world witnesses a new pope taking up his role as shepherd of the Catholic Church, we’re reminded that leadership in God’s kingdom isn’t about power, but about feeding the flock. It’s not about prestige, but about providing spiritual shelter. Last week

we heard Jesus tell Peter, “Feed My sheep,” (John 21:17). The Church must always be a place of nourishment and safety – not only in Rome, but in all places. Leaders of the Church are not called to dominate, but to serve – to be agents of God’s sanctifying grace, helping the body grow in love and maturity.

Christian Perfection and the Living Water

“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,’” (Rev. 7:17). In this one sentence, we see the heart of what we hope for as Christians. It speaks to the ultimate goal of sanctification – what John Wesley called Christian perfection – to be fully conformed to the image of Christ. To love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Jesus, the Lamb who was slain, is our Savior – and our Guide. He leads us through this life – with all its mountaintop experiences, and valleys – and also into eternal refreshment. The “springs of living water” isn’t just about a future heaven. It’s also about our transformation right here, right now. Jesus says, “Whoever believes in Me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them,” (John 7:38).

As we grow in grace, that living water flows from us into others. And don’t miss this – the Lamb doesn’t lead them to stagnant pools or shallow streams. He leads them to springs – ever-flowing, pure, life-giving. It’s not temporary relief – it’s eternal care and provision. The Lamb who was slain becomes the Shepherd who leads us. The more we yield to God’s love, the more we become channels of that love.

The passage closes with a great promise: “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes,” (Rev. 7:17b). Think of that. The same God who set the stars in place, who spoke the universe into being, stoops down to wipe away our tears. That’s the intimacy of divine love.

Being Springs of Living Water Today

John’s heavenly vision which happened while he was imprisoned and forced to work the salt mines on the island of Patmos nearly 2,000 years ago should shape our mission today. Wesley believed that salvation was always personal – but never private. We are saved to serve. Sanctified to witness. Made holy to be poured out for the world.

Where could we see these springs of living water now? When we care for a neighbor. That’s holiness in action. When a mother, or a mother-figure, nurtures her child in the love of Christ. She’s reflecting the divine image of God. When a pope uses his authority to uplift the poor. That’s pointing others to the Shepherd-Lamb. When we open our church, and our hearts, to all. That’s us living out the truth that salvation belongs to our God and to the Lamb! So today, as we give thanks for our mothers, and

pray for the new pope, let's also ask: How can we guide others to those springs of living water – to Jesus Christ?

On this Mother's Day, and in this moment of change in the Church writ large, look again at the vision in Revelation. A people from every nation, bathed in grace, made holy through love, led by the Lamb, drinking from the Spring that never runs dry. This is the promise and power of God's grace – prevenient, justifying, sanctifying – and it is for all people. It's a blueprint for hope, a declaration that suffering is not wasted, that tears are seen, that comfort is coming – and is already here and available to us through Jesus Christ.

So let us drink deeply from Jesus, the Spring of Living Waters. Let us follow Him faithfully. And let us become springs of living water present today in a dry and thirsty world.

Prayer: Loving and Holy God, Thank You for the Lamb who leads us to springs of living water, and wipes away every tear. On this Mother's Day, we give thanks for the love of mothers and ask Your comfort for those who are grieving. We lift up the new pope and pray for wisdom and grace as he begins his ministry. Help us all to follow Christ faithfully, and to be springs of living water for others. In Jesus' name, Amen.