



Revelation 5:1-13

Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals; 2and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" 3And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it. 4And I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. 5Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." 6Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne. 8When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell

before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9They sing a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; 10you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth." 11Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 12singing with full voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" 13Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, "To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"

Limited Context. At Calvary, this summer theme is *Revelation as Resistance*. Today in the city of SF, the Pride, *Queer Joy is Resistance*. As we've seen recently in our country, masked henchmen have been sent to disappear our neighbors. In such a climate, joy is an act of resistance.

Joyful Resistance. Last Saturday in Boise, a local bar owner organized a straight pride¹ festival. He called it Hetero-Awesome Fest.² He told the press that he and his hetero brothers are superior to the LGBTQ community which are a bunch of "liars and deceivers who victimize children...disgusting and criminal...wicked and perverse..."³ He promoted his event as "an opportunity to make eye contact and say no homo." But the festivities didn't go to plan. Local singer and my new hero, Daniel Hamrick, took the Hetero Awesome mainstage, and began singing a song called "Boy" —about a *transgender* boy— a child who, at birth, was identified as a little girl but carries a secret certainty deep inside that she is actually a he, more than a tom boy—a boy. Some lyrics:

*They put him in ballet, he wants to play ball.
What matters to him doesn't matter at all.*⁴

As they cut the livestream and awesome hetero men wrestled Hamrick offstage, but he kept on singing. And resisting. Joyful resistance springs from courage and conviction. The good news is that only 50 people showed up for Hetero Awesome Fest. I hope they felt safe and made eye contact. There's such sadness underneath this odd happening.

Resistance at Calvary. Contrast that to last Sunday in Calvary's social hall where Sister Roma read Ian and Sarah Hoffman's children's book; 85 people attended—some of the crowd coming inside a church for the very first time. No children were victimized. In fact, some inner children were healed.

The Big Picture. Mona West writes that Revelation is "...meant to...encourage belief in a God bigger than the world's dominant powers...*exposing*⁵ the heresy of domination...(which will be) brought to an end... so that something radically new will take its place."⁶

¹ The reason that straight pride events are generally ridiculous is this: nowhere on earth has it ever been illegal to be heterosexual. LGBTQ people have faced persecution, violence and legal oppression in virtually every part of the world.

² Chantelle Billson, "Man trolls 'Hetero Awesome Fest' attendees with pro-trans song before being booted out" The Pink News, June 25, 2025, accessed online at < <https://www.thepinknews.com/2025/06/25/man-trolls-hetero-awesome-fest-attendees-with-pro-trans-song-before-being-booted-out/>> (June 26, 2025)

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Revelation means reveal, lay bare, expose, unveil, truth-telling

⁶ Rev. Elder Mona West, PhD., "The End or the Beginning?" MCC Advent Reflections, November 2018, accessed online at < https://myemail.constantcontact.com/First-Sunday-of-Advent-by-Rev-Elder-Mona-West-PhD.html?soid=1101747410130&aid=6b3_jrT8xBU> (June 26, 2025)

Doom. Stephen Sondheim wrote the words

*Every day a little death...
In the heart and in the head,
Every move and every breath
(And you hardly feel a thing)
Brings a perfect little death.⁷*

My name is Victor, and I am a doom scrolling addict. (Hello, Victor.) I scroll until I become numb to the daily outrage. I justify my addiction in many ways, the main one being: freedom is under attack.⁸ I want to be ready to protect myself, my husband and the people I care about. I am a preacher and that means keeping up with the news.

I have learned that if I do not control my intake of news, I will slip into nihilism. Nothing will matter. How do you balance *yourself* in this world? Remind yourself daily that we are the Body of Christ, children of light, on a pilgrimage home to God. Put down the phone. Somebody say, "We're going to be okay!"

Three Goals. On June 5, Biblical theologian Walter Brueggemann took his place in the saints of light. He leaves a trove of writings and countless students, like Pastor Marci, in whom he lives on. Brueggemann wrote, "(Revelation's) promise is not in a never-never land of another world; it refers to a new city that will displace the tired violent city of Babylon (Rome)."⁹ And the current empire.

Until then, he writes: "The prophetic tasks of the church are

- 1) to tell the truth in a society that lives in illusion,
- 2) to grieve in a society that practices denial, and
- 3) to express hope in a society that lives in despair."¹⁰

Revelation 5. Today's reading contains vivid symbols worthy of a summer blockbuster. Picture the opening scene: God's heavenly court... the majestic throne room...glorious and shining...but all is not as it appears. The evil beast that once appeared slain, now has returned, disguised as a lamb, counting on humanity to accept him as our savior. Mind you, his seven horns don't quite fit under the lamb costume. He wants to brainwash humanity. We know how this goes. *Science is a lie. The news is fake. Books are dangerous. Exploitation is our new way of life. LGBTQ people are coming for your children.* The church must tell the truth in a society that lives in illusion. Expose the deception. Lift the veil.

Verse 9. *They sing a new song: "You (not the evil impostor but the real Lamb upon the throne) are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; 10you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth."*

All the tribes and languages, every people and nation. Subliminal message: there will be no border patrol in God's realm. Not the horned illusion artist but Christ, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the lion of Judah, the root of David—he will save every tribe, language, people, and nation, Jews, Muslims, Socialists included. This is how John depicts God—Peter Thiel's apocalypse obsession come to life!¹¹ Every dividing line will go poof. And light will pour in.

Flannery O'Connor wrote that even our "virtues" will be "burned away"¹² by the light of God. That is the rightly-ordered realm to come. Until then, we are called to grieve a society stuck in denial and expose magical thinking that denies science. We are called to drive away despair with songs of hope. Resist, resist, resist.

The Day the Rapture Came. As a child, I was groomed by the culture around me, groomed to choose a heterosexual lifestyle. They failed miserably! That's because grooming isn't a real thing. No one can be deceived about who they really are. The following is a true story.

Today is a cool day in early fall, the time of year when the earth seems to exhale and the leaves start to glow. I step down from the veranda to walk up from our old wooden home-place to the Baptist church for my Sunday-

⁷ Stephen Sondheim, *A Little Night Music*, 1973. Lyrics accessed online at <
<https://www.allmusicals.com/lyrics/littlenightmusic/everydayalittledeath.htm>> (June 24, 2025)

⁸ Sarah Fortinsky, "3 in 4 say democracy facing serious threat: Survey" *The Hill*, July 1, 2025 accessed online at <
<https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/5378883-democracy-serious-threat-survey/>> (July 1, 2025)

⁹ Walter Brueggemann, "The City as Container" May 3, 2023, accessed online at <<https://churchanew.org/brueggemann/the-city-as-container>> (June 20, 2025)

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ross Douthat and Peter Thiel, "Peter Thiel and the Antichrist" *The New York Times*, video interview (June 26, 2025) <
<https://www.nytimes.com/video/opinion/100000010244372/peter-thiel-and-the-antichrist.html>>

¹² "Revelation" by Flannery O'Connor (complete short story), 1964. Trigger warning: Racist language. <
https://andrewmbailey.com/oconnor_revelation.pdf>

afternoon warm-up in the sanctuary. I am eleven years old, and because Olene Hightower didn't want to, I am Sunday night pianist for the Unity Baptist Church of Plainville, Georgia. I am all that.

To my surprise, the church's front door is locked. Nobody is around... It's too quiet for four o'clock on a Sunday. So, I sit down with my music books in hand. The red bricks of the church steps scratch against my legs. I'm an only child. I like being alone.

Secretly, I have long suspected myself as some kind of alien dropped off in rural Appalachia, unlike any other child that ever lived. I'm a boy that doesn't do sports. I'm a boy that practices the piano incessantly, says my father. I'm the boy whose mother had just taken to the county records office to have his birth certificate corrected. Someone had checked the wrong box for my sex when I was born, and now, entering middle school, the registrar asked us to have this corrected. After a series of uncomfortable questions, I am properly documented and declared a boy. Sensitive in a culture that ridicules sensitivity. Designated as gifted in a culture hostile to knowledge. Everything about me feels queer.

The Baptist preacher's words come rushing in, and I realize why I am alone. Like a thief in the night, Christ has returned, and I am left behind.

Too panicked to go home, I couldn't bear to discover my sweet parents had been raptured. I've had eleven years to repent of my sin, but I don't know how. I had asked God to strike me down if how I felt was truly evil. Now scared to death, I try to imagine how I will endure the torture of eternal hellfire.

I hear behind me tires crackling gravel in the parking lot. It's Louise Ruiz in her royal blue Ford Granada. I'm not surprised she's left behind, too. She was always kinda mean. Oh great, eternity with Louise. I feel her looking into me. "Honey, what are doing here so early? What's wrong?" She doesn't even know it's the Rapture. "Did your mama forget to set the clocks back last night?"

Later during worship, I play that Baptist piano the best it was ever played, hoping to earn my spot in heaven. So many years will pass before I learn the truth of God's grace. God doesn't love us for being good. God loves us because God is good.¹³

Verse 4. And I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. 5Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."

Louise's Revelation. Louise's son Rodolfo is my best friend. Fatherless since birth, he and Louise pretty much keep to themselves. Rodolfo is bad at sports, too, but he's a musical prodigy. You do the math.

Rodolfo will grow up to remain in NW Georgia and, eventually, will open a beauty salon. He will fall in love with a man named Brian, and they will keep to themselves. One night Rodolfo will fall asleep watching TV. When he doesn't show to open the shop the next morning, Louise will call him and then find him and call me in California to say, "He just died in his sleep."

Eventually, Louise will meet an old man named Roy, and they will fall in love. Roy dies a few years later. Louise, once more she is alone. When I see Louise again, I ask her if it's okay that I sat how joyful she seems. She tells me she no longer lives in anger. All of her losses led her realize that everything she ever tried to hang on to was never hers to begin with but on loan from God—every person, every love, every possession, every emotion, every betrayal, every grief. It's all temporary. In the final state of things we will be required to place ourselves into the pierced and sovereign hands of Jesus. It was as if she had lopped off part of her faith and handed it to me.

Strength from Saints. You don't see them, but there are souls here, all around me. Over the years, I've introduced you about some of them. It's for them that I answered the call to ministry—the human beings who were groomed to accept despair as a way of life, the children groomed to accept lies about themselves. I don't know how I survived it all, but I do know why. I survive to stand on the word of God and tell you, whoever you are, that you are included in the scroll of life. You are essential to God's will.

Stand Firm. Do not accept the empire's illusions. Lift the veil, reveal the lies. Do not live in the anger of grief. Do not live in denial. And don't be fooled by the wolves in sheep's clothing. C.S. Lewis wrote, "The devil is a liar."¹⁴ Know who you're dealing with! When things fall apart, grieve. Honor your losses, but don't get stuck in grief... Look up. Take Christ's hand, and never lose hope.

Mary Oliver rejoiced in revelation. These are her words.

¹³ Rev. Elder Velma Garcia, Metropolitan Community Churches

¹⁴ <https://www.reddit.com/r/worldbuilding/comments/zb1uhb/quotes_and_proverbs_about_demons_and_devils/>

*I will sing for the veil that never lifts.
I will sing for the veil that begins, once in a lifetime,
maybe, to lift.
I will sing for the rent in the veil.
I will sing for what is in front of the veil,
the floating light.
I will sing for what is behind the veil –
light, light and more light.¹⁵*

In the name of the Alpha and Omega, Jesus Christ, the Lamb upon the throne. Amen.

¹⁵ from "Work" by Mary Oliver, *The Leaf and the Cloud*, Grand Central Publishing, 2001.