

Message at the funeral of Loretta Eilers
“Victory through the Good Shepherd” (Revelation 7:17)
February 12, 2024
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Ken, Connie and all of Loretta’s family and friends, our text for this day as we celebrate the life and victory of our dearly departed sister in Christ, Loretta Eilers is from Revelation 7:17.

“for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

So far the text...

The apostle John was granted a glimpse of heaven in this most cherished chapter of Revelation 7. And he writes what he saw in this vision, the most beautiful picture language of a victory celebration. That’s what this is all about!

The Lamb, Jesus, is in the center of the throne. And all are worshipping Him!

If you watched the post-game celebration of the Super Bowl last night, you saw a raised platform, “a throne”, if you will, on the football field, with the commissioner, the Chiefs owner, the coach, the quarterback, the tight end and all the fans cheering for the victors of Superbowl 58, the Kansas City Chiefs. All took turns holding the Vince Lombardi trophy. It was good to hear the owner give thanks to the Lord in the midst of all the celebrating.

Now Loretta was pretty accommodating when it came to sports - I’ve been told. I’m not so sure how much she followed them, but she was happy for others to enjoy their favorite teams.

In order to enjoy that game, in person, last night, and be on that football field of Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas, for the victory celebration, the average ticket price for the 60,000 people who attended was \$11,000. And if you wanted a private suite, well, that would set you back \$2 million. For that you get to enjoy some munchies like “Bacon-wrapped hot dogs, BBQ burnt-end burritos, glazed donut sundaes, carne asada fries, seafood stuffed baked potatoes, surf and turf nachos...and a souvenir popcorn.”

The victory chant was “3peat” which has never been done before. Mixed in with the victory speeches was a rendition of “Viva Las Vegas”, by Travis Kelce, who has become somewhat famous for who he is dating. That’s about the sum of it all for the greatest sporting celebration that the world has to offer. It doesn’t get any better than that for a trophy that was carried to the podium by aging football players like Larry Csonka and John Elway, a trophy that fades.

But let me tell you about another celebration – the celebration! The victory celebration that has real eternal meaning. It's the one from the Bible of which John describes in Revelation chapter 7. We go back to verse 9, a few verses before our reading to pick up some of the details. I highly encourage you to read all of chapter 7 on your own.

“I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands,”

Now this is big! This is a huge multitude of people – all types of people ...but all wearing the same victory jersey of a white robe with a palm branch ...not a Lombardi in their hands.

And what was the victory chant? **“crying out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”**

Deliverance belongs to God! God is the MVP. He delivered the victory through the Lamb, His Son Jesus. Salvation is His and all the people thank and praise Him for He alone won the victory.

The angels lead this victory chant in the next verse: **“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”**

Bookended between two amens is truth! For there is no greater truth and honor to bestow upon God for what He has done by His power, might, and wisdom. All glory is His!

What is this deliverance? What is this salvation that God has won? And who did God defeat? This is truly a victory for the multitude around God's throne for they have been delivered from the great tribulation of this world. So, we heard in our reading these words:

“These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

The price to get into heaven is a washed robe in the blood of the Lamb. Priceless. No one could pay for this ticket price. But God graciously gives entrance to all who would receive His Son through faith. So, John also wrote in his Gospel in chapter 3 these very cherished words:

“16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

My friends in Christ, thanks be to God that Loretta believed in Jesus and she is, in fact, celebrating her eternal victory even as we speak in heaven with all the angels, the saints, with Bob, her cherished husband, Jeanette and many others who trusted in Jesus alone. She was faithful unto death and received her crown of life as God promised in Revelation 2:10.

Loretta endured the great tribulation of this sinful, misery filled world through the strength of her Good Shepherd Jesus. She couldn't do it alone. None of us can. But she was promised through God's Word this amazing glorious unending celebration and she held on tight.

As I read Scripture with her, whether it was at her apartment, at the nursing home, a rehab center, or the hospital, she would close her eyes and meditate on God's Word and treasure it in her heart. One of the Scriptures I read with her about a week ago was from Isaiah 43:

**“But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob,
And He who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by your name; You are Mine.
2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you.
When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned,
Nor shall the flame scorch you. 3 For I am the Lord your God,
The Holy One of Israel, your Savior;”**

Yes, God claimed Loretta as His own, His own child as He does for each of lost sinners and tells us what He has done for us. He who has created us, has redeemed us from all sin by the blood of the Lamb. He calls Loretta and each of us who believe in Him by name at our baptism. And simply says, “Fear not”. I'm in charge. I alone can defeat death and the devil and all darkness. For I have done it once and for all through the death and resurrection of Jesus, my only begotten Son!

And so, He assures us that when we go through the trials of this life – the great tribulation, the waters, the fire, the health battles, “I will be with you”. The Good Shepherd never leaves us for He is the Lord, the Savior – Loretta's Savior and ours too!

And He brings us graciously through the final walk, through the valley of the shadow of death, to the victory celebration of heaven. Listen to Loretta's confirmation verse one more time as it is on the cover of the bulletin from John 10.

“27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.”

What a promise to God's sheep, to Loretta and all of us who hear the Good Shepherd's voice and follow Him. Never perish! The redeemed souls of the sheep live eternally and no one, no one can ever take them away. And our earthly bodies rest in peace until Jesus returns and will raise them from the dead.

Victory through the Lamb, the Good Shepherd Jesus who lives and has conquered death for the sheep! We chant not "Viva Las Vegas", but "Viva the Lamb!" "Long live, eternally lives the Lamb!" "Viva Loretta!" Eternally lives Loretta! "Viva all believers including all of you who trust in Jesus!" We have life in Jesus now and forevermore! No more tears, no more sadness, only unending joy is celebrated by all the victors in heaven. **"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen."**

"And this peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Amen. (Philippians 4:7)