

This message was delivered by Rev. Pamela Graf Short to the People of Prayer of the Tontogany Presbyterian Church on World Communion Sunday, October 7 in the year of our LORD two thousand and eighteen. It is based on the following scriptures:

Revelation 5:1-14

- 1** 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;
- 2** and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?"
- 3** And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it.
- 4** And I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.
- 5** Then 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."
- 6** Then 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.
- 7** He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne.
- 8** When 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.
- 9** They 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;
- 10** you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth."
- 11** Then 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,
- 12** singing 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!"
- 13** Then 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!"
- 14** And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the elders fell down and worshiped.

Philippians 2:1-11

- 1** If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy,
- 2** make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.
- 3** Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.
- 4** Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.
- 5** Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
- 6** who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,
- 7** but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,
- 8** he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.
- 9** Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,
- 10** so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
- 11** and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Our Bible story for today offers us a picture of global worship and invites us to listen to a new song of praise.

Yet most of all,
it insists that we look upon the Lamb that was slain.

Catholics are good at this:

They hang a crucifix in the front of every church;
they surround the congregation with the stations of the cross;
they offer daily mass.

Not so much with Protestants.

We like our crosses tidy
and prefer the congregation be surrounded by pictures of flowers instead of floggings;
We like to begin our days with little positive pick-me-ups instead of hearing
“this is my body broken for you;
this is my blood shed for you.”

But today, all around the world,
it doesn't matter if you are Catholic or Protestant or Greek Orthodox or Anabaptist or Presbyterian.
Today we are all remembering that what draws us together in heaven and on earth and under the earth
is the One whose side was impaled and whose hands and feet were pierced.
What pulls us out of our homes and into worship is the shared conviction
that the Cross cannot be sidelined as an unfortunate “oops”,
but is mysteriously essential for redemption and indispensable for the final victory over evil.
Equally crucial is the resurrection,
for without it death would not be defeated
and the Lamb that was slain would not be standing.

On World Communion Sunday we sing to the Suffering Savior.

Myriads and myriads of people who are
oppressed and betrayed,
rejected and abused,
enslaved and alone,
grieving and dying and weeping—
it is these that join the song.

How can such folks sing when their babies are starving
and their governments blow up their cities
and their children are forced into being drug mules
and their neighboring nations lock them out?

How can people sing when
their spouses beat them
or their families reject them
or their drinking water is tainted
or their friends get cancer
or their grandchildren are born with birth defects?
How can they sing? ... How can we sing?

We sing because there is One who deserves our song;
the One who is worthy not in spite of being despised and rejected, but precisely because of it.

We sing to the One who chose suffering over power and denunciation over popularity.

We sing to the One who took on the very form of a slave;
who carried the cross;
whose incarnation and life and death were the epitome of humility and the great expression of everlasting love.

We sing to the One who could have called 10,000 angels,
but instead walked right into hell to pull us out of eternal misery.

It is quite odd isn't it?
It is completely against our American mindset that we should sing to a scared-up lamb.

Perhaps on this World Communion Sunday
it is the suffering communities of the world that step up first to begin the song;
it is the suffering communities of the world that know that without this Lamb there would be no hope,
without this death there would be no resurrection,
without this Suffering One there would be no survival for the rest of us.

The suffering communities of the world sing out the story of Jesus for Jesus has made them into a kingdom of
priests who have received a sacred call to serve God.

I believe at the core of the Kingdom of Heaven you will find communities who have been persecuted;
you will find children who have been forgotten;
you will find the poor and the plain;
the refugees and the rejected.

O it is not that we here in America aren't a part of the chorus;
it is not that we aren't a part of the priesthood—
for God is gracious even to the rich.
It is just that once a year we do well to take on humility;
we do well to follow the lead of the last and the least. We do well to fall down and sing with the suffering
*"Worthy is the Lamb
that was slaughtered
to receive power and
wealth and
wisdom and
might and
honor and
glory and
blessing*

On world communion Sunday when our voices join with sisters and brothers
in Zimbabwe and Korea,
Peru and Viet Nam,
Guatemala and Haiti and Indonesia,
we sing not only with thanksgiving for our own salvation,
but we sing because the whole cosmos is being delivered from the chains of sin and death.

Our singing, our worship, our prayers,
our feasting at the LORD's Table
sends a signal to the principalities and powers in heavenly places
that the Lamb that was slain is alive and well and making all things new.

An African theologian, Isarel Kamsudzandu says "singing songs of joy frighten the devil".
Just as slaves singing freedom songs frightened colonizers, so too singing to the Lamb that was slain makes the
devil nervous because it shifts the world's attention from anxiety to hope,
from fear to love,
from death to resurrection,
and it says to the governments of all nations,
"Your power is temporary"
"You serve only at the pleasure of the Lamb".

For the day is coming when the seals will be open and the Spirits will be released and justice will be served
and the love of the Lamb that was slaughtered will prevail in heaven and on earth and under the earth.
And as we bow we will lay our crowns at Jesus feet.
Come LORD Jesus! Come!

Now may the Lamb that was slain
Stand before you in love
Feed you in strength
Fill you with grace
And sing with you in
Joy, Honor, Hope and Peace
Now and for all eternity

"The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD, and He will delight in the fear of the Lord." Isaiah 11:2-3 (NASB).

The taking of the Scroll by the Lamb results in him receiving full praise, signaling the end of the reign of Caesar. Theologically, worshipping of God and singing songs of joy frightens the devil and the oppressor and worship is such a noise in the ears of the evil one (see Luke 10:18). Like in the Global South, freedom songs were frightening to colonizers and to those who sang, they were songs of defiance, faith, and hope for a better future. Similarly, worship songs bring hope in a hopeless world of terrorism, anxieties, depression, cancer, wars, hunger, and poverty. The song of these 24 elders is the same song of Israel and it vibrates with the s
but on this World Communion Sunday

From a cosmic point of view, through a lens of eternity

And so when I hear “I saw a lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered”, I find it shocking and troubling and it makes me rouch around in my spirit thinking there ought to have been a better way.

What about worship as wholeness? As something that fulfills us? Probably an Western concept of seeking fulfillment, rather than seeking God.

Revelation 5

1 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;

2 and I saw
a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice,
"Who is worthy to open
the scroll and
break its seals?"

3 And no one in heaven or
on earth or
under the earth was able
to open the scroll or
to look into it.

4 And I began to weep bitterly because
no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.

5 Then 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."

6 Then 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.

7 He went and
took
from the right hand of
the one who was seated on the throne.
the scroll

8 When he had taken the scroll,
the four living creatures

the Lamb,
and the twenty-four elders fell before
each holding a harp and
golden bowls full of incense,
which are the prayers of the saints.

9 They 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;

10 you have made them to be a kingdom and
priests serving
our God, and they will reign on earth."

11 Then 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,

12 singing 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!"

13 Then 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!"

14 And the four living creatures said, "Amen!"

And the elders fell down and worshiped.

Lexical work

Loud

megas: great

Original Word: μέγας, μεγάλη, μέγα

Part of Speech: Adjective; Adverb, Comparative

Transliteration: megas

Phonetic Spelling: (meg'-as)

Short Definition: large, great

Definition: large, great, in the widest sense.

NAS Exhaustive Concordance

Word Origin

a prim. word

Definition

great

NASB Translation

abundant (1), all the more (1), arrogant (1), big (2), completely* (1), fierce (2), great (115), great men (2), great things (2), greater (30), greater things (1), greatest (10), greatly* (1), grown* (1), high (2), huge (1), large (8), larger (2), larger ones (1), long time (1), loud (42), mighty (1), more important (2), older (1), one greater (1), perfectly (2), severe (2), stricter (1), strong (1), surprising (1), terribly (1), too much (1), very much (1), wide (1).

Honor

timé: a valuing, a price

Original Word: τιμή, ἥς, ἥ

Part of Speech: Noun, Feminine

Transliteration: timé

Phonetic Spelling: (tee-may')

Short Definition: a price, honor

Definition: a price, honor.

HELPS Word-studies

5092 *timé* (from *tiō*, "accord honor, pay respect") – properly, *perceived value*; *worth* (literally, "price") especially as *perceived honor* – i.e. what has *value* in the eyes of *the beholder*; (figuratively) the *value* (*weight*, honor) *willingly assigned* to something.

NAS Exhaustive Concordance

Word Origin

akin to *tió* (to value, honor)

Definition

a valuing, a price

NASB Translation

honor (28), honorable use (1), marks of respect (1), precious value (1), price (7), proceeds (1), sum (1), value (1).

Glory

doxa: opinion (always good in N.T.), hence praise, honor, glory

Original Word: δόξα, ης, ἡ

Part of Speech: Noun, Feminine

Transliteration: doxa

Phonetic Spelling: (dox'-ah)

Short Definition: honor, renown, glory splendor

Definition: honor, renown; glory, an especially divine quality, the unspoken manifestation of God, splendor.

HELPS Word-studies

1391 *dóksa* (from *dokeō*, "exercising *personal opinion* which determines *value*") – *glory*. **1391** /*dóksa* ("glory") corresponds to the OT word, *kabo* (OT 3519, "to be *heavy*"). Both terms convey *God's infinite, intrinsic worth* (substance, essence).

[**1391** (*dóksa*) literally means "what evokes *good opinion*, i.e. that something has *inherent, intrinsic worth*" (J. Thayer).]

Blessing

eulogia: praise, blessing

Original Word: εὐλογία, ας, ἡ

Part of Speech: Noun, Feminine

Transliteration: eulogia

Phonetic Spelling: (yoo-log-ee'-ah)

Short Definition: adulation, praise, blessing

Definition: adulation, praise, blessing, gift.

HELPS Word-studies

Cognate: **2129** *eulogía* – blessing. [See 2127](#) (*eulogeō*).

NAS Exhaustive Concordance

Word Origin

from the same as [eulogeó](#)

Definition

praise, blessing

NASB Translation

blessing (11), bountiful gift (2), bountifully (2), flattering speech (1).

Worship

proskuneó: to do reverence to

Original Word: προσκυνέω

Part of Speech: Verb

Transliteration: proskuneó

Phonetic Spelling: (pros-koo-neh'-o)

Short Definition: I worship

Definition: I go down on my knees to, do obeisance to, worship.

HELPS Word-studies

4352 *proskynéō* (from [4314](#) /*prós*, "towards" and *kyneo*, "to kiss") – properly, to kiss the ground when prostrating before a superior; to *worship*, ready "to fall down/prostrate oneself to adore on one's knees" (*DNTT*); to "do obeisance" (*BAGD*).

["The basic meaning of [4352](#) (*proskynéō*), in the opinion of most scholars, is to *kiss*. . . . On Egyptian reliefs worshipers are represented with outstretched hand throwing a kiss to (*pros-*) the deity" (*DNTT*, 2, 875,876).

[4352](#) (*proskynéō*) has been (metaphorically) described as "the kissing-ground" between believers (the Bride) and Christ (the heavenly Bridegroom). While this is true, [4352](#) (*proskynéō*) suggests the willingness to make all necessary physical *gestures of obeisance*.]

Charles, J. Daryl, "An Apocalyptic Tribute to the Lamb (Rev. 5:1-14)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 1991.

Pivotal to the structure of Revelation, chap. 5 underscores not so much the Lamb's nature as the sacrificial role he plays, qualifying him to mediate the divine purpose. Here the Lamb receives worship, is omniscient, possesses the Spirit's fulness, is slaughtered, has power, is worthy to open the seals, is messianically linked to Judah, and is ascribed the same attributes as God.¹³ The main issue of the fifth chapter is the worthiness of the Lamb.

In the book as a whole, worship is a central issue. People either worship God and the Lamb, or they worship the beast and the dragon. **The question is: Before whom will people bow?** Seen in this light, the frequent and pronounced liturgical acclamations such as one finds in chaps. 4 and 5 have an important function: They are strong affirmations and confessions of faith. They enjoin the active participation of all beings, heavenly and earthly

2. 5:6-7. And yet the NT Apocalypse is no typical piece of Jewish apocalyptic propaganda. It is uniquely Christian in conception, for the focus of history, paradoxically, is the role of suffering in the mediation of God's purposes.²⁵ In John's vision, after hearing of the messianic Lion, he sees something quite unexpected: a lamb standing by the throne with the mark of slaughter still at the neck. **The slain lamb reminds the audience that it is a redeemed community. Only through sacrifice was victory ultimately achieved** (nikaō,²⁶ 5:3). The visual impact of where the Lamb is standing (en mesQ tou thronou) serves also to reinforce the Lamb's role: **He mediates**. Thus the Lamb is inseparably connected with the divine purpose.²⁷ The way of the Lamb would appear offensive and counter to men's thinking. Here one's attention is drawn to the order of events in John's vision: (1) The audience encounters the lion (5:5); (2) the audience sees a lamb "standing" (perfect tense); (3) the audience perceives his "having been slain" (again, perfect tense). Victory is achieved (implied by hestēkos),²⁸ yet it was acquired via sacrifice (hös esphagmenon).

In his commentary on the NT Apocalypse J. Ellul writes: Of all the animals whose death I have observed, the lamb and the ewe are the only ones who do not struggle when they are struck: at the moment when the knife cuts the jugular, the ewe relaxes and does not try to flee or kick. It gives way perfectly. It dies with a sort of acceptance. Another animal cannot be found which signifies in the same way the acceptance of death. That is why it is the only one that corresponds to Jesus: "I lay down my life."³²

Consistent with the OT and rabbinic *zâqên* whose function was representation, the elders of the Apocalypse appear to represent the Church in heaven.⁵⁰

Further, the elders of 5:8 are enacting a "priestly" function.⁵¹ Each is holding a zither (kithara) and a golden bowl full of incense in which is said to be the prayers of the saints. The kithara⁵² appears again in 14:2 and 15:2 in a worship context.⁵³ Incense occurs again in 8:3-4 and 18:13, the former describing a cultic scene in which prayers are mingled with incense and offered upon the golden altar. In 5:8 and 8:3-4 the "prayers of the saints" are given this cultic association. Psalm 142, a prayer of David, makes the same connection: "Let my prayer be set before you as incense; may the lifting of my hands be as the evening sacrifice" (v. 2).

[Commentary](#), Revelation 5:11-14, ISarel Kamaudzandu, Preaching This Week, *WorkingPreacher.org*, 2016.

Revelation summons its readers to manifest their loyalty to God, the Lamb, and the Holy Spirit to a life of worship. This is a way for them to demonstrate the Lamb's example as narrated by John in the Book of Revelation. In Revelation 5:11-14, John hears a heavenly chorus and what he hears invites readers to join him in what he sees. In this part of the letter, John places his audience in a narrative world that rejects the imperial world around them, creating what we can call a "worshipping world," where God alone is worthy to be given honor, praise, and worship. This world of worship is a place outside of all places and it deserves a divine perspective from all the participants. Universally, the multitudes surrounding the throne is incalculable and giving readers the expansiveness of the nature of God and with their entire being, these angelic creatures around the throne, praise the seven of the lamb's attributes. In a world of imperial ideology and propaganda, the angels break forth in joy singing a new song. The song is deeply divine as it is one of jubilation and a newfound certainty. They are aware that the struggles are not over yet but they believe that God has the last and final word and as such worship belongs to Him alone.

In the deep valley of pain and struggle, Revelation calls upon its readers and interpreters to sing a new song -- a song that transcends the present pain and reaches into the divine future. The song of a worshipping congregation overturns the present reality of pain and transforms that reality into a prophetic reality -- where God is in control. Worship penetrates the present darkness and transforms it into a world where God's vision is realized. **The taking of the Scroll by the Lamb results in him receiving full praise, signaling the end of the reign of Caesar. Theologically, worshipping of God and singing songs of joy frightens the devil and the oppressor and worship is such a noise in the ears of the evil one (see Luke 10:18).** Like in the Global South, freedom songs were frightening to colonizers and to those who sang, they were songs of defiance, faith, and hope for a better future. Similarly, worship songs bring hope in a hopeless world of terrorism, anxieties, depression, cancer, wars, hunger, and poverty. The song of these 24 elders is the same song of Israel and it vibrates with the same vitality as in 1 Chronicles 29:11.

Theologically, Revelation 5:11-14 orients or summons readers to the “theocentric nature of God,” in a world that claims absolute power.¹ Like in the movie “Matrix,” people are called upon to choose either the “red or the blue pill” and in similar fashion, Revelation calls people to choose between the worship of God or the empire of which John invites his congregants to choose only the former. The slaughtered Lamb is given worship and more divine attributes are accorded to the Lamb, namely: wealth, wisdom, might, and blessing. These are deeply paradoxical to human perspective, yet John invites readers to envision a new form of wealth in contrast to the wealthy of the empire. The wealthy of the empire is evanescent and the wealth of the Kingdom of God is one of service and not exploitation of the less privileged. In its worship, the church is summoned to be counter-cultural and here the 21st century church is challenged because its worship is tied to the worship of the Imperial world. This statement is deeply controversial and as I write this commentary; I invite my fellow brothers and sisters in the Global world to seriously ponder on this statement and find ways to give full loyalty to God. The question is: Who possess the true wealthy? Is it the empire or is it Jesus Christ?

"First Thoughts on Epistle Passages in the Lectionary," Easter 3, William Loader, Murdoch University, Uniting Church in Australia.

The scenes which follow show all these royal dignitaries and heavenly courtiers celebrating this powerless figure who has now been given all power. This is a subversion within the court discourse, almost a parody of power. Using celebratory language drawn from Israel's worship (especially 1 Chron 29:11-12, but also from elsewhere) the heavenly entourage hail a new hero or anti-hero. The slain lamb was the liberator (5:9). All creation in heaven and earth acclaims the new god-image or image of God. It is a very, very odd scene. It remains in the world of royal discourse, but it twists it to a point of absurdity which invites us to start again.

"Worthy is the lamb!" opens for us the opportunity to turn our thinking and our living upside down. The mythical magic of the scene invites its own undoing and might ultimately cause the whole construction of elevated dignity to collapse. "Worthy is the lamb" is perhaps something we should whisper to each other in the darkness of Gethsemane. We will know the meaning of Amen when we find God's being in the broken images and the brokenness of earthed compassion.

Commentary, Revelation 5:1-14, Luke A. Powery, *The African American Lectionary*, 2008.

Part Two: Biblical Commentary

The hymns of Revelation occur in the middle of oppression, the same human birthplace of hip hop. Despite a lack of consensus on the exact social situation of Revelation, it is clear by the tone of John, the revelator, that there is a crisis, whether it is an actual, perceived, or future crisis. The neighbors are not being so nice to the Christians. From the outset, John speaks about his persecution and patient endurance (Rev. 1:9), even enduring exile on Patmos “because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (1:10; cf. Rev. 6:9). Because of his Christianity, he has a cross to bear along with the other followers of Jesus. Though they were part of

God's heavenly kingdom, they lived in the earthly kingdom of the Roman Empire which competed with God for their allegiance. The Christians clashed with the Greco-Roman culture and religion (Rev. 9:20-21; Rev.13). In the midst of this crisis, they still had hope because Christ was "the ruler of the kings of the earth" (1:5), and God was "the Almighty" (1:8); thus, they could praise in the midst of pain, even though death or economic deprivation awaited those who did not worship the Roman emperor. This did not matter to John for his focus was on God and the Lamb. He uses poetry, not mere prose, to articulate his feelings and attitudes about God and the world, creatively colliding with those who strive to be god in the place of the one true God. He tells it like it is in a twofold manner, because doxology for John is the praise of God in the midst of real pain. Praise and pain are both necessary parts of his hymns like they are for the music of African Americans. These hymns represent the blues sensibility of black music, just as in hip hop. Kanye West may say with confidence that Jesus walks. Jesus walks among "war with terrorism, racism and most of all . . . With ourselves." "The Devil trying to break me down" and "the restless might snatch your necklace." Hip hop does not shun pain but sings and cries from it and acknowledges the African American reality, keepin' it real.

John keeps his music real. The troubled existence of the Christians is hinted at throughout John's hymns which function as a political polemic against Roman imperialism on one level. The presence of a polemic implies pain. His hymns are interested in God, but also in fighting Roman politics. As one scholar notes, "praise is the beginning of political practice."³ His musical vision sings against the imperial cults, and the injustices of life. "God show me the way because the Devil trying to break me down." Just using the hymn form to praise God, which was normally used to praise Roman gods, was an indictment against the Romans. John wants to "crack down on Rome while raising up the Lamb."⁴ In this "crack down," pain is present; if this were not so, a "crack down" would not be necessary. John begins with weeping while his praise is focused on the pain of the Lamb, "standing as if it had been slaughtered" (v. 6). This phrase points to the pain of a Passover sacrifice (1 Cor. 5:7), alluding to the sacrificial death of Christ. His being "slaughtered" (Rev. vv. 9, 12), and his "blood," are emphasized for pain is at the heart of this hymn. In other words, John is singing "I know it was the blood for me. One day when I was lost, he died upon the cross!" The Lamb, standing and slaughtered, relates to the "walking wounded" who suffer

under Roman oppression. If this was a clean, bloodless lamb, it would not be worthy because “worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered” (v. 12). It is this Lamb, this Jesus, this bloody figure that pervades the hip hop scene. It is not just the negative images of women or the false sense of maleness that are paraded but the images of a crucified Christ pervade hip hop to keep it grounded in black religious memory. The slaughtered Christ is the original gangster and has the “Juice” because Jesus walks with us, even “the hustlers, killers, murderers, drug dealers even the strippers, and victims of welfare.”

For John, worthiness stems from experiencing pain. The Lamb, a crucified Christ, is one of the wounded and thus worthy of worship. Even in his given reasons for worship, John appeals to the painful past of Egyptian slavery (“slaughtered,” “ransomed for God saints,” “made kingdom and priests serving God”) for through the pain of Christ, humans are ultimately delivered from their pain. The pain does not stop the praise because through the pain, praise was born (e.g. “You are worthy . . . for you were slaughtered”) showing how pain is the “matrix” of praise.⁵ Life under the rule of the Romans did not satisfy thus John focuses on a ruler of another kingdom, not the expected conquering messianic Lion of Judah but a bloody slaughtered Lamb. And even the Roman emperors will eventually pay homage to this God (v. 13) for there is only one King (1:5, Rev. 17:14) and it’s not the bling. The Lamb of God reigns “forever and ever (v. 13)!”

John’s purpose is to exalt God and persuade us to do the same, for it is God’s power alone that can undo the earthly powers of Roman imperialism. That’s why his refrain is “worship God!” (Rev. 19:10; 22:9), not sex, money, or power. Because of God, there is a “new song” of praise. If a listener was not attentive initially, the “loud voice” of an angel captures the imagination and ears of the hearers. When no one is found anywhere to open or look into the scroll, John despairs and weeps “bitterly” over this tragedy. But his weeping turns to singing when the Lamb appears. The presence of the Lamb is so overwhelming and exciting that the crowds contagiously grow (v. 11) and grow while they sing “with full voice” (v. 12). The hymn of 5:9-14 is a musical crescendo which gradually increases in size and volume as the Lamb becomes a greater focus. In the beginning, there is John, the one on the throne, an angel, and one elder (vv.1-5). Then

the four living creatures, the twenty four elders, and the Lamb increase the size of the vision, along with the “saints” (vv. 6-10). The crescendo continues when John hears the “voice of many angels” numbering “myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands.” (vv. 11-12). Finally, John hears “every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them” (vv. 13-14), leaving nothing and no one excluded from the praise. This chapter begins with a mournful solo (John weeping), but ends with a joyful symphony, all because of the Lamb.

The Lamb is the impetus for the praise and this is John’s main point. The Lamb is worthy to be praised. There is no reason for doxology without God and the Lamb. The Lamb has perfect knowledge and strength (seven horns and seven eyes), is omnipotent and omniscient. The Lamb is the one who controls human history because he’s the one who can open the scroll, the book of destiny about God’s will. If this isn’t enough, John triggers our memory of God’s past faithful liberating actions during the Exodus. The Lamb is worthy because he was “slaughtered” (Ex. 12:6, Lev. 14:13, 1 Cor.5:7, 1 Peter 1:18), and his blood “ransomed for God saints,” and he made them into “a kingdom and priests serving our God” (Rev. vv.9-10; cf. Ex. 19:6). The Lamb is praised for what he has concretely done for others. John does not present an empty summons to praise but fills it with valid reasons because our God is one who acts in the world. Remember, “Jesus walks.” John speaks in this manner to persuade his audience that what God did in the past, God does in the present. “God show me the way because the devil trying to break me down.” This Exodus God is their God because God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Brian Blount is right that “John recalls the past in order to charge people up in the present.”⁶

John definitely charges up the Roman powers when he places God on the throne, especially because the throne is the center of the universe, and God's placement there means that God is the center and power belongs to God. This is a clear attack on the earthly thrones of the Roman emperors, wherein from John’s perspective only one can sit on the throne, God Almighty. The throne is never described because the throne by itself is not what is significant, but the one on the throne is. God is the center of our attention and praise. God is king, no earthling. John wants his hearers to shower lavish praise on God, and in so doing they will declare political

resistance against the imperialist regime of Rome. He realizes that praise legitimizes social power⁷ and all power is God's. Praise is a subversive act towards Rome's power and in this doxological resistance, pain is inevitable, thus John shows us that praise happens amidst real pain and struggle. One can praise and still stay connected to the real world.

"Jesus walks." He might be slaughtered but he's still standing. Hip hop is not just hype but holds together real hurt and hope at the same time. It has to when black on black crime persists on the streets. It has to when schools still don't have adequate educational resources. It has to when Brenda's "Got a Baby" (Tupac's song about teenage pregnancy). It has to when police profiling persists, "getting choked by the detectives." It has to because that's keepin' it real. This is the way the Christian life is—pain and praise together. There is hurt and yes, there is hope. Hip hop may have its problems like misogyny and economic gain off the reality of the poor, but it can also help the Church keep it real by its yearning for something different and something better from God. "God show me the way."

Celebration

Pain is real but it does not and will not have the final say when God intervenes. The Lamb, though slaughtered, stands, thus overcoming pain and death and defeat. Jesus walks (out of graves). We, too, can stand though in pain (slaughtered). Christ will ransom us, delivering us from modern day oppression. Trouble don't last always!

"The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD, and He will delight in the fear of the Lord." Isaiah 11:2-3 (NASB).