Topic: Victory Parade (Season of Easter 3, Lectionary C)  
Scripture: Psalm 23, Revelation 7:9-17  
Hymns: Mothers of Salem, VU1 Joyful, Joyful, VU245 Praise the Lord With the Sound of Trumpet

———

Let’s take a moment to pray…

Lord, before this world's days even began, your Word was in the beginning, and it was with you and it was you. The mystery of that brings us to our knees. Yet today you allow us to open your Word and know you better. So, we ask that you would give us eyes to see and ears to hear. Give us hearts open to your Spirit as we seek you. AMEN.

(SLIDE) This morning's reading from Revelation looks a lot like a church gathered in worship. But, I think depending on our context, we imagine it in different ways...

We may look at this passage and see a massive gathering of people, all dressed in "their best" pure white robes - not a speck of dirt nor a wrinkle to be found, standing before a pulpit of sorts, the Throne. Each has a palm branch in hand, so we know the elder or steward on duty that day prepared to have enough to go around.

And in unison, like our responsive psalm, they all say at (SLIDE invite) once: **Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb**. The elders, angels, and living creatures... the choir we might say, fall on their faces worshipping, saying (SING Catholic): **Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever**.

That's a very Western way of thinking about this passage. Neat. Organized. Reverent. Orderly. But, sadly... lacking in some ways. What is the pulse of this worship? Where is the excitement, the overwhelming joy, the fever of Prophecy coming to fulfillment!?

From a different perspective, we may look at this passage and see a massive gathering of people all marked in a distinctive way, set apart by white robes and palm branches as if their hand was stamped at the door for entry.

With loud voices they shout at the top of their lungs (EM): **Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb**. You wouldn't catch any of us shouting ANYTHING at the top of our lungs in church, would you? And saying AMEN aloud during the service?! Forget about it...

But here's the angels, the elders, and living creatures bowing and saying aloud (EM): **Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever**.

It's not orderly... it's not very neat... and to some it doesn't look reverent from the outside but the worship is genuine and passionate spontaneous. It's reactive to the Spirit's movement, acting in the moment to the excitement of the Spirit and overwhelming joy of all that's happening. It's a very different culture of worship than what we may be used to.

Something that I think we in the West don't always clue into is that Heaven is not a funeral procession, with nice and orderly segments of music and Scripture and moments of silence. There is sequence to it, yes...

But sequence should not be mistaken for this sort of subdued and sombre idea we tend to have about it. Heaven is supposed to be a victory parade... and here in Revelation 7 we see the beginning of the parade on display.

This is not a polite, quiet gathering... this is an explosion of praise directed at the Lamb who has saved them. When someone does something that literally saves your bacon from some awful consequence, do you just say "thank-you" very politely and sit quietly after? I don't think we do.

I think of police officers who save someone from a hostage situation, or fire fighters who rescue children from burning buildings. People are hysterically thankful... they shout their thanks, they typically cry, hug and kiss the person who saved them.

Much like Jesus entering the city to loud Hosannas, that if He were to stop the crowds and His Disciples from cheering and shouting the very rocks would cry out... Here, these gathered - the saved - cannot help but praise God with every last bit of everything they have.

Do we make space in our worship of God for that kind of excitement?  
At Wednesday worship I've broken the rules a little and I've been teaching about the seven words of Praise found in the First Testament Hebrew. When I started Wednesday worship I said the messages there would be fairly unstructured, so no big long sermon series like I've done here on Sunday mornings.

So we've been learning about these seven words... we've done three so far (SLIDE). YawDaw, HawLal, and ZawMar. YawDaw is all about praise and worship with a physical extension. You might see me sometimes in worship raising my hands during songs.

That's YawDaw, and it is on display in Nehemiah when the people are gathered the things are being rebuilt. People praised God by bowing, shouting 'Amen, Amen', raising their hands to God, singing, and preaching the opened word of God.

HawLal, means to boast and rave and celebrate almost mindlessly. We saw it in David when we recovered the Ark of the Lord from the Philistines and brought it back to Israel. As David marched the Ark through the streets, he danced with all he had before the Lord - even naked.

He didn't pay any mind to anyone's judgment of him, even when his wife scolded him as irreverent and indecent before his people, David said that he would celebrate the Lord no matter what.

And just last Wednesday we learned about ZawMar, which means to celebrate God with music and singing. It reminds us about the Psalms and how they were originally sung, and not simply spoken. They were set to music, like a praise song we sing on Sunday mornings or a hymn.

And whether you CAN sing, or not; whether you CAN play an instrument or not, isn't the point. God just wants worship with music and voice. ZawMar reminds us that it's not about your performance, it's about your participation.

Notice that each peice of praise has a physical and spiritual component to it. Praise is not meant to be just quiet, still, completely orderly and stoic... no victory, no parade is quiet, still, and completely orderly.

There's a spontaneous component, which is usually the Spirit moving, that causes us to move, to dance, to sing loudly, to say AMEN when a part of the sermon resonates with us, to lift our hands in worship to the God who literally SAVES us from the pit.

How can we sit idly, still, and quiet when we are reminded of that?

Heaven is not a place where we will all sit on fluffy clouds, quiet, and bored. Heaven is a place of radical unity, passionate worship, and eternal rest in Jesus Christ - His actions alone secured this for us, it is our inheritance.

And all you have to do to get it is belong to the Lamb. One day we will all stand together and worship God in this glorious fashion - shouting, dancing, singing - every tribe and every tongue, not in chaos, but as the most glorious chorus the universe has ever known.

It couldn't hurt to do a little rehearsing while we're still here on this earth. AMEN.