

Saturday, October 21, 2017 - Day 293 – Ezekiel 45-46, Psalm 90, Revelation 14

I remember once when I was in college worrying about whether I would be counted in the 144,000 of today's reading from Revelation. I asked my good friend Bob, who was and is the kind of serious Christian I aspire to be, "Bob, do you think you'll be among those taken up by God at the end? The 144,000?" He answered quickly and unequivocally, "Yep." I worried. I didn't have Bob's faith. I bet, if I sat down with a piece of paper, I could even get pretty close to writing down a list of 144,000 people who were more righteous than I was. Bob would definitely have been on that list. Nowadays I don't think that number, 144,000, is meant to be taken so exactly. I know a little bit more about biblical numerology than I did back then, and I can easily recognize that 144,000 is a factor of 12, a biblical number of completeness representing the twelve tribes of Israel, which in turn is often used to represent the totality of God's people.

Do you consider yourself to be among God's righteous people? Do you believe God's mark is on your forehead? Remember your baptism. Remember Jesus' baptism: when he came out of the waters the heavens opened, a dove descended, and the voice of God spoke, "This is my beloved son..." At your baptism, God claimed you as well and God said, "This is my beloved son," or, "This is my beloved daughter," about you.

At this point in Revelation, we're toward the tail end of a long section (chapters 6-16) that is describing the way things are: in a word, bad. People forget God, whole cities and cultures defy the living God with idolatry, warfare is rampant, and the devil is on the prowl. During such times as these, it can be hard to hold on to our baptismal identity as a beloved daughter or son of God. The prevailing culture can easily overwhelm us and cause us to forget who and whose we are. But read on, friends. The next section beginning in chapter 17 tells a different tale, a tale of how things will be in the fulfillment of God's plan. It is glorious and beautiful. And even I believe, now, that I will be there, among the righteous. Among the beloved children of God.

By The Very Rev. Ryan Whitley