This brings us to the first two triads. “Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth” (vv. 4-5). The overarching triad is the Trinity: Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit. “God who is and who was and who is to come” is God the Creator, the God who exists outside of time and space. It is God who created the heavens and the earth and all that lives therein. This revelation speaks to the eternal nature of God, a timeless and tireless being who’s name in the Old Testament, *Yahweh,* means“to be” (Exodus 3:15; 6:3). When Moses asks God’s name, God says “I AM,” for God simply is, existing above and apart from human beings. The description of “Him who is and who was and who is to come” applies equally to God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, but here John chooses to name them separately.

“The seven Spirits who are before his throne” speaks to the perfection and completion of God’s work by the Holy Spirit. In biblical numerology, seven indicates something holy or perfect. The idea of seven spirits is language from Isaiah 11:2, describing seven aspects of the Holy Spirit: “*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* ***fear of the Lord****.”* There are not seven different gods, but rather one Spirit who holds all these characteristics in complete perfection. The second person of the Trinity brings the One God’s will, the grace and peace John cites, to fruition.

The last part of the Divine Triad, Jesus Christ, is styled by three titles which describe who he is and what he does. Jesus is the “*faithful witness*.” His witness is the Way, and the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6). His witness is faithful to God his Father and to his people, even unto death. The Greek word for witness is also the word for “martyr,” someone who gives his life for his beliefs. By his life and death and resurrection, Jesus bears witness to the Truth of God’s grace and salvation.

Jesus is also the “*firstborn from the dead*.” Jesus is not simply the first person resurrected, he is also pre-eminent, the first in priority. As Paul puts it, Jesus is “*the firstborn among many brothers and sisters*” (Romans 8:29, NIV). The use of “firstborn” does not mean that Jesus is a created being and, thus, not fully God. The ancient Rabbis called God the “Firstborn of the World.” The Rabbis also used *firstborn* as a Messianic title. God said, “*And I will appoint him to be my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth”* (Psalm 89:27).”

The notion of the Messiah as a firstborn son brings about the third title for Jesus: “*ruler of the kings of the earth*.” A firstborn son inherits his father’s honor and power. When Paul speaks of Jesus as being the firstborn of all creation (Colossians 1:15), he means that Jesus is the Lord of the universe; to Jesus belong the first and highest places of honor and glory. Before the Book of Revelation is over, Jesus will take dominion over every earthly king. He will claim earth as part of God’s Eternal Kingdom. Jesus already rules a kingdom, but it is a kingdom that is “not yet” of this world. His is a kingdom slowly being realized through the followers of Jesus, and its arrival is assured.

The revelation goes on to show that Jesus, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of earth does three things for us: he loves us and set us free; he makes us a kingdom; and he appoints us to be the priests of God. Having just come through Easter, we are very familiar with how much Jesus loved us: all the way to the grave and back. Jesus “*loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood*” (v. 5b). But notice the verb tenses here. “Loves us” is in the present tense. Jesus, who is God, who was and is and is to come, is alive forevermore and will continue loving us throughout eternity. His love for us did not end at the cross but extended beyond the grave and into eternal life.

On the cross, Jesus “set us free,” past tense, achieving for us the remission of our sins once and for all. Our sins are forgiven, forever. Christ died on the cross once and that act is sufficient for all persons, for all time. What happened on the cross in a moment of time is a window into the eternal, unchanging, unceasing love of God.

Being loved and freed, Jesus “*made us to be a kingdom*.” This is a quote from Exodus 19:6: “*you will be for me a kingdom*.” Jesus gives us royal status. Through him we may become the true sons and daughters of God; and if we are sons and daughters of the King of kings, then we are highly exalted, fortunate to be members of God’s family. We represent God to humanity, and humanity to God. We offer sacrifice to God (Hebrews 13:15) and have privileged access to God’s presence (Romans 5:1-2). There can be no higher honor.

Jesus also appointed us “*priests serving his God and Father*.” Under the old covenant, only the high priest had access to God’s presence; but under the new covenant in Jesus, we all have access to God. That access means we can know God’s will for us and for the world. Our status as royal sons and daughters carries with it the responsibility to act in ways that are pleasing to God, and in ways which accomplish God’s purpose. The 15th century reformers called this the “priesthood of all believers”; each one of us is chosen and empowered to fulfill some part of God’s great plan of redemption. We can boldly approach the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16), because there is a new and living way into the presence of God (Hebrews 10:19-22).

John wraps all these triads up in a song of praise: “*to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*” (v. 6). Considering all that Jesus did for us, it is right to praise him. We are not *giving* Jesus glory and dominion, they are already his; but we *recognize* that he has it and honor him as worthy of our praise. To recognize the glory of Jesus is to proclaim his salvation for all the world to hear, to be his faithful witnesses. To recognize his dominion is to let Jesus rule over us, to make him the king over our lives. As priests of the Living God, we must give him dominion over our little kingdoms, and let him unite our bodies, minds, and spirits in harmony with his will and purpose. Amen?

Amen! This ancient word, brought over from the Hebrew, literally means “so be it.” It is a resounding “Yes!” to God’s invitation in Christ to serve by the power of the Holy Spirit. As John closes this section, he reminds us that Jesus is coming again “*with the clouds*” (v. 7), that is, in the glory of God. When he comes, all people will see him, even those who “*pierced him*” and opposed him. All will “mourn” (a reference to Zechariah 12:10 and Matthew 24:30) as they recognize their own sins and their part in his death. We will look at his scars and say, “We did this to you.”

But that sobering thought is exchanged for the glory of knowing Christ the Alpha and Omega, our creative beginning, and our redemptive end. Jesus has a plan for history, and he directs the path of human events toward his designed fulfillment. Our lives are not given over to blind fate, to random meaninglessness, or to endless cycles with no resolution. Jesus, who was and is and is to come, the Almighty, has his hand on everything. He is in control over the past, present, and future. Good things truly come in threes. Praise God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Hallelujah! Amen.

Prayer: Triune God, One in Three, thank You for Your amazing grace and perfect peace which You supply in such abundance to all those who are called by Your name. Help me to take to heart all the truths that are contained in Your Word and help me to apply it in my life - to Your praise and glory, in Jesus’ name I pray, AMEN.

Sources:

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**Good Things Come in Threes**

Sunday, April 24, 2022 Revelation 1:4-8

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

It is often said that *good things come in threes.* Three feet in a yard. Three goals in a hat trick. Three little pigs, three bears, and three blind mice. Three little kittens who lost and then found their mittens. The Kingston Trio, the Three Tenors, and Peter, Paul, and Mary (the singing group AND the followers of Jesus!). Three stooges. Three French hens. Three Billy goats gruff. The three-legged race and the three-point landing. Three dimensions. Three cheers. Three bean salad. Three Musketeers. Winken, Blinken, and Nod. Snap, Crackle, and Pop. The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly. The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe. Genies always grant three wishes. The best circus is a three-ringed circus. There are three quarks in a proton (look it up!), three-piece suits, and three wheels on a tricycle. The triangle (three angles and three sides) is the strongest shape. There are three primary colors. The American Declaration of Independence promises a trio of good things: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Earth is the third rock from the sun.

In the Bible, the number three occurs 467 times! Readers are reminded that “*a cord with three strands is not quickly broken*” (Ecclesiastes 4:12). There are three patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Three wise men visited the Christ Child, bearing three gifts. Jesus rose on the third day. Of course, there is One God in Three Persons: Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit. And if God says something three times, it is very, very important!

The concept of three is rooted in the Latin principle known as *omne trium perfectum*, loosely translated as “everything that comes in threes is perfect.” So, it is probably not a coincidence that in the Book of Revelation, things come in threes. In our reading today, we have three sets of three: God who was, and is, and will be; the three titles for Jesus; and the three things Jesus did for us.

The Book of Revelation gets a bad rap because it is often highjacked by cult leaders and crazies on street corners. Admittedly, the imagery in revelation is strange (like an album cover from the 1970s) and a little unnerving (like a zombie uprising); but, in truth, Revelation is a book about the blessings God bestows on humanity in Jesus Christ. The word “revelation” comes from the Greek *apocalypse*, which means “a revealing, an unveiling.” This is the revelation of Jesus Christ in the sense that it belongs to him: he is the one doing the revealing. It is also Jesus’ revelation in the sense that he is the object being revealed: we learn much about the person and mission of Jesus by reading this book.