

In 1969 when astronauts first walked on the moon they sent back snapshots of the earth. Those photos had a remarkable effect on humanity. We suddenly saw ourselves not as a globe carved up by national borders, but as a single blue entity, wrapped by the clouds of heaven. The pictures made us see the earth not as a battleground, but as something we all hold in common.

That awareness of community is one of the themes of today's passage from the Book of Revelation. John has just seen a scroll with seven seals, and he lamented that no one was worthy to open the book. But then he saw a Lamb slain but standing, and the Lamb was given the scroll as the one who was worthy. A community of creatures stands around.

In the symbols of this book, the slain, standing Lamb refers to Jesus, killed at Passover like a lamb, but risen from the dead like no one before him. The scroll will tell the destiny of all creation. That scroll is given to the Lamb, as if to say that the future of everything is in the hands of Jesus Christ.

Around the lamb are many figures. There is "one who sits on the throne," meaning God the creator of all. There are 24 elders, probably representing the 12 tribes of Israel from the Old Testament and the 12 apostles from the New. Then there are countless numbers of beings representing all of creation in the heavens, on the earth, and under the sea. All these creatures sing a hymn of praise to the one on the throne and to the Lamb, saying that blessing and honor, glory and might belong to them forever and ever.

John's vision of the cosmos can have an effect on us similar to those photos of planet earth. All of a sudden, we see how we fit with everything else. We are part of what God created. We are united with every other living creature. We are united by the life we share, but we are also united by the death that threatens us, and, in John's great vision, we are united by the Lamb who has conquered death, the one to whom power and riches, wisdom and strength, honor and glory and blessing belong.

Too often we let disunity afflict us. Having race and ethnicity is good, but improperly regarded, it affects the friendships we make, the merchants we support, and the neighborhoods we live in. Having national pride is good, but it prompts us to stockpile weapons and to inconvenience immigrants. Having religious belief is good, but it can distort our ability to see everyone else -- Protestants, Jews, and Muslims -- as brothers and sisters.

During the Easter season we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus and the promise of our redemption. Throughout Lent we performed acts of kindness and self-sacrifice. But today's vision of Easter has us doing something else. It has us united with all of creation, doing what we all were created together to do: singing the praise of God.