

All Saints Day (observed): November 3, 2024
“Responsible Ownership”

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

All Saints’ Day is in a time of both sorrow and joy. We grieve at the loss of loved ones. Since the last All Saints’ Day, as members of Immanuel, we have laid to rest Marvin, Richard, and Esther. There are other family members and friends that you may have also laid their bodies to rest to await the resurrection. While we grieve, we don’t grieve as those who have no hope. We have sure and certain promises from God that death cannot end our gladness, because we are baptized into Christ. And, if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His.

This morning we will focus our attention mainly on the words recorded by John, as he was in exile on the island of Patmos. It is in chapter seven we see a picture of the church militant and the church triumphant; that is, we see the saints on earth and the saints in heaven. We are also given a back-stage pass, a behind the scenes look, to few that things that are going on with God’s saints.

By the time we get to Chapter 7, the first six seals have been opened, and it is not a pretty sight. In the horrible scenes that have unfolded before John, man is plagued with an insatiable hunger for power and aggression. Violence and famine are poured upon earth, which have driven men down right along with it.

Death is unleashed and rides across the tattered landscape. The blood of martyrs cry for vengeance, and if that wasn’t enough to make a man’s blood curl, the moon becomes like blood, the sun is darkened, and there is a great earthquake; all of which we bear witness to as God’s Son died on the cross. After these truly terrifying sights, John is granted a sort-of reprieve, which is our text for today.

While all of these things are happening, chaos and death unleashing their fury with all they can muster, John sees four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the winds of destruction. In Matthew, Jesus even mentions good angels as having their hands in what we might see as destruction.

He says, ***“Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”***¹

The angels are holding back the destructive winds because something must happen first. Another messenger ascends from the rising of the sun and commands, ***“Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.”***² Before the destructive winds can be unfurled, the servants must first be sealed.

We have a bit of a problem with this in America. Not so much a theological problem as a cultural one. The seal shows ownership. It signifies certain property belonging to a certain person. Servants were often marked, and given certain signs that set them apart. The seal was a marker to clearly identify to whom a person belonged. While we don't talk about it in the same way as ownership today, unless we want to be canceled or in martial trouble today, we kind of do similar things. We wear wedding rings to set us apart. The uniform of pastors on a day to day basis is black shirts and white colors, as a signifying mark that we belong to someone else. We are sinners, and what we are to speak is purely God's Word, not our own. We wear different clothing on Sunday mornings than you, that are meant to diminish the person and exalt the office of Christ and His Word.

In almost every store, you can tell an employee because they will wear clothing that is branded with the company who employs them. Sports teams have certain uniforms that every player must wear, showing they are part of the team.

In Revelation we read, “The servants of our God” are to be sealed; they are marked. They are to be identified and signed with God's own signature. This establishes you are God's personal property. The sign sets you apart. You belong to Him and His kingdom. While ownership of people has a bad history, and I have to be careful of how I say this, ownership is not always a bad thing. Sin makes it bad. Sin destroys and distorts the relationship and our understanding of it, but consider what is happening in Revelation.

¹ Matthew 13:40–42

² Revelation 7:3

When you belong to another, there are certain responsibilities that are in play. We can fight and argue about all kinds of political responsibility and who is responsible for what and how far that should, or should not, go, but their responsibility comes first from the family. The family is the first place to understand, teach, instill, and reinforce what proper responsibility looks like. There are certain levels of responsibility that are delegated to those outside of the family which lays the line of where their responsibilities should lie. Government, businesses, spiritual fathers, these have lines that are not greater than any authority that is given to parents over their children. As God's representatives, parents bear a particular, special responsibility for the physical and spiritual care of the children who have been placed under their care. Unlike politicians who answer for their failings to the voters under their constituency, parents answer to God Himself.

As children of God, this is good news for us. We belong to Him. As His children, you are directly in these words of promise, "***They shall be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them.***"³

Marked with God's seal, Paul speaks, "***God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are his.'***"⁴ You can be absolutely sure of your salvation, and your faith, because it rests on the truth of God's Word. It does not rest on your changing emotions. It rests on His unchanging grace.

He has placed His seal upon you. As you belong to Him, you are given everything that is His, while He takes everything that is yours. And just what is it that you have? Not as a gift from God, but that which belongs to you, that which comes from you, apart from God's gracious hand. What is it that is truly yours that has been yours since conception? Jesus says, "***Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander,***"⁵ and we love to act on these impulses. Worse, we try to justify them, and explain them away.

³ Jeremiah 32:38-39

⁴ 2 Timothy 2:19

⁵ Matthew 15:19

On our own, left to our own devices, apart from God, we turn to dishonoring any of God's authorities, we don't seek to protect all life, or fight for the sanctity of marriage. We are not content with the many gifts God has given, and we don't always put the best construction on everything, because defending is not as much fun as flashy plays and scoring points on our neighbor.

The multitude that surround the throne of God shout an important truth, "***Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!***"⁶ God possesses salvation. It belongs to Him. Now there is something that stands out about this multitude. They are a great multitude that no one could number. This instantly should recall the promise God gave to Abraham. They are clothed in white robes and have palm branches in their hands, wonderfully piecing together for us both the Transfiguration and Triumphal Entry of our Lord.

Victory over sin and death is not found from us. It is found in the promised seed through Abraham: Jesus Christ. Jesus is the one who defeated death and owns salvation. He bore the wrath of God against sin, taking the responsibility against sin for you, and for all people.

Salvation belongs to Him and to whomever He gives it. One of the ways in which He gives, you know, is through baptism. There is an importance practice done during baptism that gives and teaches this very thing. At baptism, the person receives the sign of the cross upon their forehead and upon their heart, to mark them as one who has been redeemed by Christ the crucified. We are reminded of this at Immanuel in many ways. One clear way is those who approach the altar, before one is able to partake of the Lord's Supper, the sign of the cross once again marks them while speaking another baptismal blessing, "The Lord keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and even forevermore.

As the saints of God are sealed, after receiving salvation, John records, "***All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.'***"⁷

⁶ Revelation 7:10

⁷ Revelation 7:11–12

Did you catch it? ***ALL*** the angels. Remember, four of them were holding back the winds of destruction, but now no longer. As God's saints are owned by God and in His kingdom of grace, their faith is protected by Him. The saints keep their eyes ever on the Lamb of God, even as the world changes around them.

As the destruction is happening and the angels and the four living creatures are magnifying God's Name, one of the elders turns to John and asks, "***Who are these clothed in white robes?***" I love that. John's response, "My Lord, you know." Then John receives the answer, "***These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation.***"⁸

By the Lamb, who possesses salvation, their robes are washed in His blood. This is not clothing like Jesus' clothing in the Transfiguration. This is a *stola*, a garment that would be given to them, placed over them, much like the wedding garment. It is also a garment that would have implications of binding them together, yoking them together as one.

As they are given the blood of the Lamb, they serve as one. They wear one uniform, one color, as they are one group, one family, set apart. They give to their God sin and death, and receive what?

He "***will shelter them with his presence.***"⁹ This is the word for tabernacle. Literally, the One who sits on the throne will tent them. You will be under His roof, with His rules, with His Name, His protection, His love, His grace, and His mercy.

You "***shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike [you], nor any scorching heat.***"¹⁰ While the wind and sun are destructive forces, you instead have the Sun of righteousness. You have the wind of God. It is hard to convey in English. The Old Testament Hebrew word for wind and Spirit are the same. Jesus will speak of the wind blowing when and where it wishes, and for the saints of God, the Spirit of God blows, breathing His Word to His servants, His children, His people, you!

⁸ Revelation 7:14

⁹ Revelation 7:15

¹⁰ Revelation 7:16

But that's not all, as one owned by God, "***The Lamb in the midst of the throne will be [your] shepherd, and he will guide [you] to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from [your] eyes.***"¹¹ This of course brings back Psalm 23. The water is no longer destructive, but calm. It is a water teeming with life. It is a water "***of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.***"¹²

While the world crumbles around you, while your sinful flesh is set on destruction, you are bought and paid for; you are marked and sealed by God. This doesn't mean that bad things will not continue to happen to you, your loved ones, or in the world. What it means is that your salvation is secure. Eternal life is already yours.

Like the martyred saints of old, you may be required to stand steadfast in battle bold. Like them, you too have been given God's Holy Spirit. You are in His kingdom, even now. Through God's mercy, you in midst of the whatever battles you are facing, mid the lions roaring, you sing songs of praise of outpouring. You can joyously take your stand on the arena's bloody sand, because you are God's own child. You can gladly say it. You are baptized into Christ. Death cannot end your gladness. You are a child of paradise. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

¹¹ Revelation 7:17

¹² Titus 3:5-7

Prayer of the Church
All Saints' Day (observed)
1 November 2024

In peace, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the poor in spirit, who gather this day to receive God's grace and steadfast love by which we are made rich in Christ, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all God's people, washed in the blood of the Lamb, that we may be restored daily through repentance and forgiveness and renewed in holiness, righteousness and faithfulness, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all ministers of the Gospel and the congregations committed to their care, that they may proclaim the comfort of Christ's sacrifice and the joy of His resurrection to all who grieve their sin and mourn their dead, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For fathers and mothers, that they would be strengthened to raise their children in the faith; for those who long for families, that their prayers would be answered; and for expectant mothers and their little ones, that they would be preserve and protected, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all civil authorities, that our Father would look on them kindly and give them wisdom, courage and integrity, for our nation, especially this week of elections, that trustworthy leaders are chosen, that wise decisions are made, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially *Pam, Alex, Sophia, and Chris*; and for those who celebrate another year of earthly life, especially *Marvin, Marina, Tim, and Jacob*; that God would send His holy angels to guard and keep His children; that they may thank and praise him for the gift of life and for the protection and care He has provided; that God would grant them to grow in grace, continue to know His loving-kindness, abide in the confession of His care and protection, serve Him faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of His joys in heaven; let us pray to the Lord; **Lord have mercy.**

For the sick, the aged and infirm, the dying, and those afflicted in any way, *especially Dick, Ken, Ann, William, Zoey, Jeri, Pastor Small, Debbie, the Central Iowa Dance team and those we name in our hearts*, that God would grant healing according to His will and comfort them with the certain hope of the resurrection, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who mourn, *especially the family and friends of Esther*, that they may find peace and joy in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

Almighty God, we remember with thanksgiving those who loved and served You in Your Church on earth and who now rest from their labors. This past year we especially remember Marvin Honold, and Richard and Esther Huedepohl.. Keep us in fellowship with all Your saints, and bring us at last to the joy of Your heavenly kingdom; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**