

All Saints' Day (Observed): November 4, 2018
“Responsible Ownership of the Saints”

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

All Saints' Day is a great day of particular comfort. The Augsburg Confession rightly confesses, *“Our churches teach that the history of saints may be set before us so that we may follow the example of their faith and good works, according to our calling...Scripture sets before us the one Christ as the Mediator, Atoning Sacrifice, High Priest, and Intercessor. He is to be prayed to. He has promised that He will hear our prayer. This is the worship that He approves above all other worship, that He be called upon in all afflictions.”*¹

The Apology, or defense, of the Augsburg Confession says, *“We should thank God because He has shown examples of mercy, because He wishes to save people, and because He has given teachers and other gifts to the Church...The saints themselves, who have faithfully used these gifts, should be praised just as Christ praises the faithful businessmen (Matthew 25:21, 23). The second service is the strengthening of our faith. When we see Peter's denial forgiven, we also are encouraged to believe all the more that grace truly superabounds over sin (Romans 5:20).”*²

I know All Saints Day is hard for some, as the memory of loved ones is brought to the forefront of our minds. The assigned texts for this day are absolutely beautiful. 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, at what really goes on with God's saints.

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, driving down men right along with it.

¹ AC XXI

² Apology XXI p. 4-6

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; our text for today.

While all of these things are happening, chaos and death all around, John sees four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the winds of destruction. Angels were understood by the Jews as having certain tasks over nature given to them by God. Jesus mentions good angels 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.***"³

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.***"⁴ The servants must first be sealed.

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. It was to be clear just to whom a person belonged. Today, Pastors have black shirts and white collars, 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. You can tell an employee at almost any store because they are branded; they wear certain colors or uniforms, of their owners. 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, and it is not always for the bad.

³ Matthew 13:40-42

⁴ Revelation 7:3

When you are part of a group, when they own you, they take on certain responsibilities. We can fight and argue about fair wages and health care and all sorts of stuff, but the reality is, whether it is an owner of a business, a sports team, or even of slaves, they have a responsibility to care for and protect those under their sign.

In this great communal act, what belongs to the person is given to the owner, and what belongs to the owner is given to the person. An employee, a sports player, gives time and talent in exchange for pay, trophies, and a sense of community. Our text is greater than sports teams, and worldly business.

To be God's property, is to be 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.***"⁵ Marked with God's seal, Paul speaks, "***God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are his.'***"⁶ You can be absolutely sure of your salvation, and your faith, because it rests on the truth of God's Word. Through His Word, you are sealed. You belong to Him and He will protect you. Not only will He protect you, but He gives you all that is His, while taking everything you possess.

What is it that you possess? Take a few moments to take stock. What is it that is truly yours? What belongs to you? Not given to you by the merciful hand of God, but yours since your birth, and what you work so hard to acquire? Look to your life. Examine your heart and mind. Listen to your words, all of them. Recall your thoughts. Call to mind your past actions towards one another. What do you possess? Violence, aggression, and hostility. You possess sin and death. You are greedy and possessive. You are quick to keep and hide away, even quicker to lash out. Quick to serve yourself, and let your neighbor serve themselves.

Halloween was this past week, and I'm sure you didn't keep the good candy for yourself, or take it from the kids while they were sleeping, "No kids. There were no Twix bars handed out this year."

⁵ Jeremiah 32:38-39

⁶ 2 Timothy 2:19

If we are quick to do this to the littles of our own family, how easy to treat our neighbors with the same poor actions and attitude. Jesus says, “***Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander,***”⁷ and we love to act on this impulses. Worse, we try to justify them, and explain them away. What we should expect is to be thrown in the fire where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

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!***”⁸ 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. This should instantly recall the Transfiguration and Triumphal Entry of our Lord.

Victory is found in the promised seed through Abraham, fulfilled in Jesus as He suffered and died for the sins of the world. The wrath of God against sin was leveled against Him for all the saints. As salvation belongs to Him, He gives to whomever He wills. 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. Before one is able to eat the family meal, they at this altar receive this Word of God, “May the Lord bless and keep you in your baptismal grace.” God’s children are signed and sealed, they are servants of God and through His very Word are given all that it His. Strength in temptation; yours. Forgiveness of sin; yours. Victory over death; yours. Eternal life; yours.

As the saints of God are sealed, after they have received salvation, hear these words, “***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.’***”⁹ 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 possessed by

⁷ Matthew 15:19

⁸ Revelation 7:10

⁹ Revelation 7:11–12

God, they are protected by Him. This is an important lesson we learn from Lot, and his wife. The saints keep their eyes ever on the Lamb of God, even as the crap is hitting the fan around them. Lot's wife didn't listen to God's Word, she did her own thing, and things didn't go so well.

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.**"¹⁰

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.**"¹¹ 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.**"¹² 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!

But that's not all, as one owned by God, "**The Lamb in the midst of the throne**

¹⁰ Revelation 7:14

¹¹ Revelation 7:15

¹² Revelation 7:16

*will be [your] shepherd, and he will guide [you] to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from [your] eyes.”¹³ 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.*”¹⁴*

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. You declare, “*How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.*”¹⁵

While you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you are first sealed. The Church militant will suffer, there will continue to be great tribulations, but it will not lose faith. The Church triumphant continues to add in number from all tribes and people and languages, all those who have faith in Jesus and Him crucified.

“O blessèd saints in bright array
Now safely home in endless day,

Extol the Lord, Who with His Word

Sustained you on the way.

The steep and narrow path you trod; You toiled and sowed the Word abroad;

Rejoice and bring Your fruits and sing

Before the throne of God.

The myriad angels raise their song; O saints, sing with that happy throng!

Lift up one voice; Let heav’n rejoice

In our Redeemer’s song!”¹⁶ Amen.

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

Prayer of the Church All Saints’ Day (Observed)

¹³ Revelation 7:17

¹⁴ Titus 3:5–7

¹⁵ Psalm 36:7–9

¹⁶ Behold a Host, Arrayed in White LSB 676:3

4 November 2018

Let us pray to the Lord our God, who raised Jesus from the dead. Almighty God, You have knit Your chosen people together into one communion in the mystical body of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Give to Your whole Church in heaven and on earth Your light and Your peace. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Grant that all who have been baptized into Christ's death and resurrection may die to sin and rise to newness of life and so pass with Him through the gate of death and the grave to our joyful resurrection. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Grant that all who have been or will be nourished by the holy body and blood of Your Son may be raised to immortality and incorruption, to be seated with Him at Your heavenly banquet. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Give to all who mourn comfort in their grief and a sure confidence in Your loving care, that casting all their sorrow on You, they may know the consolation of Your love. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Give courage and faith to Your people who pass through difficult and trying times [*especially commending to Your care this day Carmen, Susan, Larry, & Bonnie*]. Give them relief according to Your will and strength to meet the challenges ahead in the assurance of a holy and certain hope and final healing at the resurrection of the dead. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Remember in Your kindness all entrusted with civil authority among us, and give them wisdom, courage and integrity. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Raise up ever new servants of the Word, and strengthen and sustain those whom You have sent, that the good news of sin's forgiveness and death's defeat may bring everlasting joy to Your elect. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, our times are in Your hands. Look with favor, we pray, on Your servants **Marvin, Tim, Roger, Eric & Zachery** whom You have granted another year of earthly life. Grant that *they* may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen *their* trust in Your goodness all the days of *their* life; Lord in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

In joyful expectation of the resurrection to life eternal, we remember before the Lord our departed family and friends who have gone before us in the faith and all those who are in our hearts and minds this day [*moment of silence*] Almighty God, we remember with thanksgiving those who have loved and served You in Your Church on earth and who now rest from their labors. 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.**