

Sermon November 1, 2020
"An Eternal Promise for All the Saints"
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Grace and Peace to You in the name of God Our Loving Creator and Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Welcome to All Saints Sunday at First Lutheran!

While it may not seem like much is aligning in the year 2020, one thing that did align is that in 2020 is November 1st falling on a Sunday, so we can celebrate the day on a Sunday together. This celebration gets overshadowed by Halloween every year, but October 31st is not only Halloween it is also Reformation Day when Luther posted his 95 Theses in Wittenburg. As Luther called the church to be alive in the Word of God and be reborn through Scripture. As we talked about last week, he called his contemporaries to remember who Jesus was and that the grace of God is not held back from us, but grace is given to us freely, like water washing over us, as naturally as water drip down to the ground due to gravity. God's powerful grace is for us, even though we don't deserve it because of our own actions.

Our texts today on All Saints Sunday remind us that while God is responsible for this redemption and justification of human beings, God amazingly invites us to participate in the healing and redemptive work in the world as we share God's goodness and mercy with a world who expects judgment.

Our gospel today is one of the most familiar biblical texts we have, known as Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. It comes at the beginning of his ministry, but Jesus has been out healing, exorcising and helping people already. And at this point Jesus has people's attention, and they may be asking, "Well, what is this all about?" Jesus then lets people know what his ministry is all about. A new kingdom. A new realm. A reality of transformation and role reversals. Jesus has introduced a new movement based on this, that claims the promises of the prophets, and now names what it means to be a part of his community.

It is a community of surprise, where those who the world calls blessed, are surprisingly not those that Jesus calls blessed. Those that are the left behind, the marginalized, the misunderstood people that swim upstream and speak against the current, are named as part of this community and the divine blessing that is more valuable than any thing the world offers.

Jesus says" "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. 5 "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. 6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. 7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. 8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. 10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of

heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account."

Each Beatitude that is listed, sets up divine blessing and support.

At different times, one Beatitude may speak to us more than others, and we may see ourselves and those we know as part of these communities more clearly.

I hear clearly this Sunday the promise that peacemakers, not those who seek conflict and war will be blessed and will be called "Children of God". Our Epistle lesson from 1 John Chapter 3 also tell us what it means to be God's children, "See what love the Father has given us, that we should called children of God".

But Jesus does not say that his Children will be spared from pain or grief, but he says "blessed are those who mourn". Certainly, this is a year that has seen more than its share of mourning, especially with the those who have died from Covid-19 added to the grief that our world, communities, and families already have. On All Saints Day we remember those that have died and those who mourn... and the surprising promise to all of us that mourning will turn to dancing. That somehow just like the reversals of the Beaitudes, the final reversal is that Death will be defeated, and we will share in the community of the saints who celebrate eternal life with Jesus.

Many people turn to the Book of Revelation in order to hear about the judgment that Hollywood tells them to expect in its pages. But the doom that is predicted, is always delayed and the visions of the eternal community around Christ is always inviting people in.

In Revelation 7, that we read today, this judgment is put on pause yet again and instead of judgment we hear of a great multitude of every nation, tribe, all peoples and language standing before the throne of the Lamb. During the rest of Revelation the fierce enemy of Empire is introduced and described in terrifying Halloweenish horror terms. But this ghoulish reality is triggered by action that we see today as humans putting earthly rewards ahead of God in a new idolatry, gathering resources and power in an effort to become immortal.

In answer to this challenge and these demonic characters that are raging and preparing for battle with God, God puts forward the divine champion and it is...a little lamb. Perhaps some of you have seen the movie Monty Python and the Holy Grail. In it there is a build up of a fearsome and deadly creature protecting a cave where the grail may be, and when they see the creature it is a bunny rabbit! Which hardly scares the knights who are used to battling armies, but this bunny is quite fearsome they find out!

This is similar to the build-up that readers and hearers of Revelation experience. "Who is our champion against these terrifying foes... wait... What?.. We have a lamb?" In the Greek the lamb is even described as a "fluffy savior".

This is a continuation of the Beautitudes, when humans expect armies and earthly might to oppose this Empire of Evil, they are surprised and reminded that God does not need to reveal his power as we expect, and yet the Creator's power is greater than anything humans can produce. Pretending otherwise is wasted energy. Games to try to become immortal are nothing compared to what God offers. A promise to mortals that they too can gather around the throne, that holds the name above all names Jesus the Lamb who was slain, and yet through this blood, purifies our whole lives. His red blood washes our sins clean.

The Lamb sits there with blood, as a newborn who is the first to be reborn from the dead. Christ has defeated the ultimate enemy and all enemies of God and the Children of God are protected by this fluffy savior, by this God who dies on a cross at the hands of the empire, but rises again in the resurrection that we are also promised in the waters of baptism.

Who is this multitude around the throne? Revelation says, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. 16 They will hunger no more, and

thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; 17 for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

This is the promise of a powerful God to his children. This is the invitation a loving God makes to the world again and again. This is the love that is greater than all earthly pretenders...that is eternal. And we have all of this, all these eternal promises in the waters of baptism, and Earl, Myra and Matt and all the others we remember are in that multitude and there is a place for us there, and here around our font, the springs of the water of life, this eternal river that flows through the City of God in Revelation, flows through this baptismal font, flows through the water in front of you at home, and flows through the new covenant in your heart, bringing forgiveness hope and love, from the place where our promises rest in the Lamb's power fulfilled.

And now, may God's healing love comfort those that mourn, and may the peace of those promises, that pass all understanding, keep your heart and mind in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.