

LECTIONARY SERIES
October 28, 2020

LESSONS FOR ALL SAINTS

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you have knit your people together in one communion in the mystical body of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Grant us grace to follow your blessed saints in lives of faith and commitment, and to know the inexpressible joys you have prepared for those who love you, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Revelation 7:9-17

Book of Revelation is written to seven churches in western Asia Minor.

It was a time of great oppression and our lesson was a response to a question posed in 6:17 – *Who is able to stand?*

We are given the assurance of God’s protection and a vision of a final victory.

Lesson is just prior to the opening of the seventh seal.

We are given an interlude that assures the people of God that they are protected.

Just when we are expecting even more destruction we see this hope-filled message.

The scene shifts!

Four angels stand at the four corners of the earth holding back the destructive winds.

Mission is to hold back the judgments until the people of God can be sealed (7:1-8).

Even in the most difficult sections of Revelation the judgment of God eases.

A similar *salvation interlude* will interrupt the sequence between the 6th and 7th trumpet.

Interlude functions to shape the identity of the people as protected and separated.

It prepares the community to persevere in its witness even in the midst of hardships.

In our lesson the people are sheltered by the presence of God.

Worship and praise are central.

After the vision one of the elders gives its interpretation in question-and-answer format.

The tribulation was the social, economic, and religious marginalization of the people.

Those who come through the tribulation now serve God who tenderly cares for the people.

Lamb tends to the flock and leads people to springs of water and wipes away all their tears.

By the end of the interlude of Revelation 7 we can confidently answer the question –

Who is able to stand?

With the help of God the faithful will stand.

Your thoughts

Psalm 34:1-10 and 22

Fear the Lord, you saints of the Lord; for those who fear the Lord lack nothing.

Psalm 34 is a *Hymn of Thanksgiving*.

Fifteen *Hymns of Thanksgiving* can be found in the book of Psalms.

Writers give thanks to God for deliverance from various life-threatening situations.

Situations could include illness, enemies, and outside dangers.

In this psalm the superscription places it within a particular life situation of King David.

Story in the Biblical text that might be associated with this psalm is found in 1 Samuel 21:10-15.

David fled from Saul and went to King Achish (not Abimelech) at Gath.

Achish recognized him and David was afraid for his life.

He feigned madness to disguise his true identity.

(Historical setting aside) what is important in the psalm is the setting.

Setting allows us to gain insight into the meaning and intent of the psalm.

In Psalm 34 David praises God for deliverance from a life-threatening situation.

Psalm 34 is also an alphabetic acrostic.

Each verse starts with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Acrostic poems were the work of highly skilled literary artists.

They functioned in ancient Israelite literature in at least three ways –

- 1) Most likely it was a memory device to aid in private and public recitation
- 2) Summarized all that could be said (or needed to be said) about a particular subject
- 3) In an acrostic the source of all words was offered in praise of God

Scholars see the psalm as a hymn of praise by David because his very life was delivered by God.

It is a summary of all that could be said about the help of God in the face of oppression and hurt.

We are to heed the words of the psalmist and find in them hope for deliverance.

Blessing and praise are common themes –

In Hebrew the word to *bless* comes from the same root word as *knee*.

To bless is to literally *bend the knee* or *to kneel before a sovereign*.

In Hebrew the words for *praise* and *boast* come from the same root word as *Hallelujah*.

Praise will be in the mouth of the psalmist.

In the soul of the psalmist he will find its praise (boast) in the Lord.

God delivers (snatches away) and God saves (to take full care of).

God enters the troubled situation of the psalmist and cares for him in the midst of trouble.

We are to join in praise of God's deliverance.

We are to try the goodness of God and experience it as one who would taste a new food.

We are to open our eyes and see the goodness of God that is all around us.

Taking refuge in God (being protected and loved) will result in an inner sense of contentment.

Your thoughts

1 John 3:1-3

A saint is one who has been set apart by God for the purposes of God.
God (out of divine love) set us apart to be his children.
Our hope rests in that we shall see God as God really is.

First John gives us hope for the saints who have preceded us in death.
It also reminds us of our current identity as children of God in an overwhelming world.
Our lesson is part of a hinge that flows from the admonition about antichrists (2:18-27).
Later section (3:7-18) describes the differences between children of God and those of the devil.
Larger context shows the seriousness of the letter and intensity felt by the writer.
But the overall focus is on encouragement rather than a loss of faith.
We are reminded of our identity and called to live out that identity in love.

In our lesson the writer takes a moment to address us directly.
We are encouraged not only about the future but also about the present.
For the author of 1 John *eternal life* is not just a future hope but a current reality.
We find repetition and parallelism that is so characteristic of 1 John.
Author contrasts *we* with *the world* (in John the *world* are those who do not believe).
Rejection we face from the world is because we proclaim our faith in Jesus Christ.
World does not recognize Christ and so does not recognize us.

In 1 John our present reality as children of God is the foundation of our future hope.
We are reminded of the boldness we will have when Jesus returns.
Rather than hiding in shame we can be bold in our approach to Christ.
We will be fully transformed by the complete vision of Christ.

1 John 3:3 includes within the message of hope how we are made holy.
We are made holy by continuing to confess both our sins and the true identity of Jesus.
In John 17:17-19 (Jesus' prayer) this sanctification is not only for believers but for the world.
Rather than justifying our separation from the world we are reminded of our mission.
We are to love (and all who are in it)!

Your thoughts

Matthew 5:1-12

In the Beatitudes Jesus provides a unique description of those who are blessed with his favor. His teaching is surprising and shocking to those who seek wealth, fame, and power over others.

In the Gospel of Matthew the Beatitudes are within the context of the start of a new community. Jesus just announced that the kingdom of heaven had come near and invited people to repent. In the Greek the word *to repent* is *metanoia* which means *to change one's course of action*. Lesson needs to be read as a transformation into the community just started by Jesus. It revealed what the new community would look like. It addressed those who experienced various kinds of oppression. It also addressed those who had been targeted because of their pursuit of righteousness. Promise of blessings were given to each of these oppressed groups.

In Greek the word *makarios* is often translated as *blessed*. Term occurs in several parts of the Old Testament Septuagint (especially in Psalm 1). In Psalm 1 blessings belong to those who refuse to be wicked and find delight in the law. Blessings will manifest themselves in the form of God's protection for the righteous.

Beatitudes also build upon motifs from the wisdom literature that promise deliverance. In 1 Enoch 58 the promise is made for a bright future and long life for the righteous. There is also a promise of a reversal of fortunes in these texts. At the same time the Beatitudes should not be seen as glorifying situations of suffering. Promise of deliverance and reversal point to the future. It is also built on what Jesus has already accomplished (a successful track record).

How will the afflicted and the oppressed be blessed?
How will their deliverance come about?
Verse 4 offers an insight.

In the Greek the word for *comfort* has a force behind it that our English word does not capture. It suggests that those who mourn will receive advocacy (not just comfort and consolation). Comfort and consolation are helpful and essential but not merely sufficient. It addressed the symptoms of their situation but did little to change the roots of suffering. As followers of Jesus we are called to advocate on behalf of the oppressed. We are to do everything in our capacity to reverse their situation. As important as thoughts and prayers are they must be followed by concrete actions.

Who is the agent of these actions?
Who will advocate on behalf of those who mourn?
Who will fill the hungry?
Who will show mercy to the merciful?
Who will call the peacemakers the children of God?

Passive voice leaves the answer open-ended.

We are to remember that the disciples have just been invited to help advance the new kingdom.

We are to participate in the process of making the promised liberation a reality.

Oppressed are to participate in their own liberation.

Afflicted and the oppressed are not just objects of our compassion and advocacy.

We must work with them to facilitate the reversal of fortunes Jesus has promised them.

Your thoughts

Readings for November 4

Amos 5:18-24

Psalm 70

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Matthew 25:1-13