

**All Saints Sunday
November 1, 2020**

Text: Revelation 7:9-17

Sermon: Robed in White

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Last Sunday I was on a spiritual high from the time I woke up until I finally fell asleep at the end of the day! It was Reformation Sunday and it started with us gathering for worship to hear the familiar words to *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*. If you watched me closely you would have noticed that I was singing very softly to myself. I could not help it! The Spirit took over! I was bursting inside by the time we came to the end of the hymn.

If that were not enough then in the afternoon nine of our young people were confirmed and made public affirmation of their faith. Only by the grace of God did the live-streaming actually work so that all those who watched could see the power of the Holy Spirit descend upon each of the nine with words of blessing. Later in the day I learned that 100 people were watching from as far away as Germany – grandparents and aunts and uncles and nieces and nephews. It warmed my heart to hear that at least one young person heard with clarity the sermon message. At the end of the service she turned excitedly to her mother and said – *Great! Tomorrow I have a quiz in my religion class. If I do not know one of the answers on the quiz I will just write Jesus!* She listened well.

And if that were not enough then at 4:00 pm we posted the Synod Reformation Service on our Redeemer Channel. If you have not seen it yet then I highly recommend that you watch it. Our music team is featured throughout. Joy opens with a beautiful rendition of our theme song. I told her that I could listen to her play that piece a thousand times over (and I think I have). Midway through the video our choir members pulled all the different parts of the service together into one awesome song of praise to God. In-between the pastors in our conference creatively took the church outside of our buildings. The whole video is awesome!

At the end of the day I realized that last Sunday was the first time since March that we could experience the church in its fullness. It was a brief and welcome break from what is happening in the rest of the world – the rise in the number of people with the virus, more raging fires in the West, another hurricane in the Gulf area, and the anticipation of what will happen after Election Day. For at least 24 hours I could set all of that aside and find real joy in the presence of our Lord.

We get another break today on All Saints' Sunday as we look at the lesson from Revelation 7 (yet another one of my favorite passages). When the text opens with the words *after this* it is wise to consider what went before. What we read today is part of a very long scene that takes place in a room that houses the heavenly throne. We discover the Lamb of God sitting on the throne opening seven seals of a mysterious scroll. In Chapter 6 the first six seals of the scroll are opened and it causes quite a commotion. The physical foundations of creation are rattled and the destruction reaches such a high pitch that all the people hide. The *Day of Wrath* has come and in the midst of the chaos we hear the words – *Who is able to stand?*

When the writer reaches this point in his vision – he stops. We have a momentary timeout from the overwhelming suffering and destruction of the first six seals. Just when we are expecting even more devastation with the opening of the seventh seal there is a delay. The scene shifts. Four angels stand at the four corners of the earth and hold back the destructive winds. Their mission is to hold back the judgment of God until his people can be sealed.

What a powerful message for us to hear today! We get another Sunday to catch our breath as we wait with the four angels to see what happens next. Another angel comes on the scene and calls out with a loud voice: *Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads*. Remember in Genesis 4:15 the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one would kill him. Remember that in baptism we are sealed with the cross of Christ forever. We have a mark on our foreheads. We have been sealed by God.

After this we are invited to look and see a vast international, multi-racial, multi-lingual throng of people so great that no one can count. All these people are robed in white and carry palm branches.

The robe is an important piece of clothing in the Bible. It indicates not only our outward appearance but says something about who we are. It defines our status. Remember in the story of the prodigal son he was given a new robe to show that he had been restored in the family. In this vision the believers are wearing white robes and are carrying palm branches as signs of victory and joy. They have come to celebrate and worship.

It is a beautiful image to see all the angels standing around the throne and falling on their faces to worship God. And as the elders looked around and saw all the people in white robes they asked – *Who are these people? And where have they come from?* And I love the answer – *They have come out of the great ordeal. Those robes were made white by the blood of the Lamb.*

On this All Saints Sunday we will pause for a few brief moments to remember all those who have gone before us in faith. We will hear the names read and the bells will toll. We will remember the more than 225,000 people who died from COVID-19 in the United States and the more than one million people who have died worldwide. It gives us a moment to grieve but also to move to thanksgiving for their lives. Our loved ones will find their place among the saints as they gather in the presence of God. We can picture them standing before the heavenly throne. We can feel the depth of God's grace and the wideness of his mercy.

It is the Lamb who will be their shepherd. God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. The victory of God portrayed in Revelation is our reminder that we are connected to his grace and his loving power and we share in his ultimate victory.

In this powerful moment of encouragement, hope, and comfort we can imagine that the saints are not only those who are robed in white but each of us who have come (or are still coming through) ordeals both great and small. We too struggle to find hope and healing and hear today the promise that God will wipe away our tears. We hear in this promise a hope that enables us to take our first steps toward a future not defined by our past.

Last Sunday we adorned ourselves and the church in red to indicate the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through us. We were on fire last week as our voices quietly sang our praises to God. It was a big day in the life of the church. It was a glorious day from start to finish.

But on this Sunday we dress the church in white ... the color of purity and completeness. We wear white because we no longer have to stand at the graveside in our grief but we stand with confidence. We rejoice with all the saints because our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ rose from the dead and ascended into heaven to sit on his throne and to receive the great multitude too numerous to count. Our songs of praise are in thanksgiving to God for his steadfast love and mercy. With the joy of the Reformation still fresh, we hold back the troubles of this world for one more week to bless the Lord, to lift our voices and magnify and exalt his holy name forever. Amen