

November 6, 2016
“Lutheran Words: Holy”
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Grace, Mercy, and Peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

As we continue our Sermon Series Lutheran Words, today we look at the word Holy.

Now, it is obvious that Lutherans do not have a patent, copyright, or claim on the word Holy. God does. And our Old Testament text from Isaiah gives us a glimpse of God’s holiness.

Visualize this: Isaiah the prophet sees the Lord on his throne. The Lord’s robe fills the temple. Smoke fills the temple. Above the Lord are seraphim, angels, flame like beings with wings, and one called to another and said, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

And the foundations and the doorposts and thresholds shook at the voice of him who called. Imagine yourself before the Lord’s throne. Imagine yourself in Isaiah’s sandals.

Your eyes, your ears, your nose, your body, all your senses are overwhelmed by the holiness of the Lord. The most beautiful sight you have ever seen..... and at the same time the most terrifying, awesome sight that shakes you down to the bedrock of your soul.

And it shook Isaiah as well and he said, “Woe to me, for I am destroyed; for I am a man of unclean lips; and I am in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the king, the Lord of Hosts.”

Do you ever feel that way? Do you ever say to yourself, “Man, I am such a sinner. How can I ever approach or stand before the holiness of God? I am destroyed! Can anyone stand in the presence of God’s holiness? Well, certainly not on our own merits or worthiness.

But then, in our reading from Revelation there is a great multitude that no one could number from every tribe and every nation and language standing before the throne of God.

They are crying out and worshipping God. The angels are standing with them around the throne and are also worshipping God.

How are these able to stand before the throne and worship without the fear of the uncleanness that Isaiah had before the throne of God? When Isaiah said, “I am destroyed because I am unclean.”

This is the same God, the same throne-room. Again, imagine yourself before the Lord’s throne. And the Bible also tells us that from God’s throne come flashes of lightening, and rumblings, and peals of thunder.

Your eyes, your ears, your nose, your body, all your senses are overwhelmed by the holiness of the Lord. The most beautiful sight you have ever seen..... and at the same time the most terrifying, awesome sight that shakes you down to the bedrock of your soul.

How is this multitude able to stand before the throne and just sing praise to God with no fear of uncleanness? How can anyone stand in the presence of God’s holiness?

Revelation tells us that these multitudes are the saints in heaven. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ these saints have been washed clean by Jesus. Jesus has made them holy. They are saints because of Jesus. These are the faithful who died in the Lord.

These are the saints who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. The white robes are a symbol of purity, and Christ's people are purified by His blood shed for them.

We can also say that these saints are our loved ones who have preceded us in death. These are our grandparents, our parents, perhaps our children, our Aunts and Uncles, our family members, and our friends who have died in the Lord.

They now stand in the presence of God and along with angel hosts, they sing praises to God and serve Him. They are the faithful who died in the Lord and are now in the loving arms of Jesus. And there is no better place to be.

But where does that leave us? We are still here on earth, struggling against sin, war, and sickness and disease. Maybe we are grieving the loss of those we love. Maybe we are really struggling with the loss of this world. But we need to remember.

We have been adopted into God's family through baptism. We too have been washed clean by Jesus Christ and made perfect through His suffering and dying on the cross, and His resurrection from the dead.

He paid for our sins. He washed our uncleanness. He has made us saints. He makes us holy. Jesus has made us all able to stand before the throne of God and sing praises without the worry of uncleanness. What a relief that it does not depend on me. We can worship along with the saints in heaven.

In fact, when Christians gather for worship in this world, they may be understood as participating by faith in the ongoing heavenly praise that we read about in revelation.

When we approach the Lord's Table today we will not be touched on the mouth by a hot coal from the fire as Isaiah was, but we will be touched on the mouth by the true body and blood of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

We will be participating in Holy Communion with our dearly departed loved ones. Recall our Apostles' Creed confession, "I believe in the Communion of Saints."

The Christian Church believes that when we commune we are communing with all the saints, including our dearly departed loved ones.

For that reason, in remembrance of the saints, Churches used to build the communion rail in a circle, and the earthly sinner/saints would commune on the front side with the heavenly saints communing with us on the other side.

We remember today the saints who have gone before us. We remember the faithful cloud of witnesses who have helped to light the way for us. We remember our loved ones.

We give thanks for the legacy of love and faith passed to us. We give thanks for their love that endures through time.

Our lives have not been the same since they left us. We miss them. Certainly, we grieve.

But we are not a people without hope. We are a people who have been adopted into God's family.

We are a people who will be wrapped in the loving arms of Jesus when we breathe our last. We are a people who will someday stand before the throne of God and the Lamb and sing praises and worship and serve God.

And Revelation Seven tells us that the saints before the throne are sheltered in the presence of Him who sits on the throne.

Let me repeat that, the saints are sheltered in the presence of Him who sits on the throne. Can you imagine it?

There is no hunger, no thirst, no scorching heat. For the Lamb will shepherd them and guide them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Can you imagine it?

As God's people we know that death is not the end. Redeemed by Jesus Christ we have a sure confidence in eternal life with all the saints.

Through the promises of God we have not said goodbye to our loved ones, but only til we meet again. What a wonderful reunion that will be.

I had shared in an earlier sermon that my Grandad and I were very close. He lived next door. We did everything together. Best buds.

When he died back in 1983, a pastor named Lester Wolf sent a sympathy card to my family and we found this comforting. It was read again at the funeral of my cousin who died several years ago. It reads:

“Your loved one now lives with the Redeemer of all ages. He talks with David, Isaiah, Mary, Ruth, Paul, Peter, Matthew, John, Dorcas, and a host of others. He sings with angels and arch-angels and glorifies God with the cherubim and seraphim. He basks in the radiance of the rainbow encircled throne; meditates on the shores of the crystal sea, passes fountains of living waters, and serves God night and day in His temple.

Your loved one has all of his questions answered by Jesus, has all of his tears wiped away by the handkerchief of the Almighty One, knows no more pain, laughs death to scorn, sees Jesus face to face, and waits at the golden gates for our arrival. He has never had it so good; he has never been this happy; and he has no desire to return to this world that he recently left.

You, too, can have on your lips songs of triumph, for ... as your loved one is with Christ ... so Christ is also with you. “I will not leave you like orphans” He promises, “but I Myself will come to you!”

What a comfort. As we continue in our earthly lives of sin and uncleanness, as sinners, let us remember that we are also saints who have been washed by the blood of the Lamb.

To be a saint is to be holy. Thanks be to God that through Jesus Christ we are made holy and are able to approach his throne in praise, thanksgiving, and without fear.

May the Lord give us strength, patience, and comfort until the day we are before His heavenly throne singing praises and serving in his temple...

Until we are reunited with our loved ones when we will all together be in the shelter of His presence..... In the shelter of God’s presence; can you imagine that? Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, guard our hearts and minds in
Christ Jesus. Amen.