

Pastor T.C. Arnold
All Saints (observed)
Rev. 7:9-17
November 4th, 2012

Have you ever thought about how “looking back” affects our “looking ahead”? Our experiences with certain things color the way we might go about doing something in the future. And it may not even be with our own experiences. Perhaps the experiences of our parents or grandparents that have taught us beneficial life lessons affect the way we go about making decisions for our future selves. We have people here present today who have had experiences with the Great Depression. My grandfather would stop on the side of the road to pick up a rusty coffee can. Someone of my generation would just pass it by. We know how the World Wars, Korea or Vietnam have affected the way people think. What about the effects of the Cold War and the fear of nuclear Armageddon. Living in the information age of today has influenced us and our kids in ways we would have never understood a decade ago. Our past experiences or lessons definitely influence the way we think about our future. Or, even *worry* about the future.

What about our future beyond our future? What about heaven? Has our experiences of today affected how we see God, live our Christians lives, or the way we understand heaven to be like? This is a “for sure” fact; there has been a lot to be anxious about in times past. Whether it be making a living, a war, the realities of terrible storms with the weather or with life, anxiety plays a big role in the life of the Christian. Anxiety plays a role in our life when we think of what is yet to come – because what is yet to come is unknown.

Well, what is unknown for you might be what will happen in your life on this side of eternity – but not what will happen when this life passes away. St. John the Apostle shows us what is to come – what we can be sure of – because we can see it “with our ears” in the Epistle text for today. We get a chance to peer into heaven with John and see the numerous saints that fill the halls of heaven. These words are words of comfort in an anxious age. These words show us Christians what to expect – what is “for sure” for you and me – what we know to be ours.

John writes, “*After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes of peoples and languages, standing before the throne before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’ ... ‘They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’*”

Heaven is a place of no more tears. Just like those old Johnson and Johnson Baby Shampoo commercials – no more tears. But for the saints today – that’s you – we know that there are more tears. Young saints that are here this morning... your tears are of a certain kind. You may cry over fellow students, homework, friendships, breakups, sports injuries, bad grades, or perhaps a situation at home that is less than favorable. These are big things for you. They are troubling and cause anxiety, worry and stress. I remember these times and you adults out there remember them too. I sometimes find my own expectations of my kids are beyond the expectations placed upon me by my parents. How much stress am I adding... is the world adding to our children? Kids, your times of tears will unfortunately not be over when you graduate school or finally find that relationship you are looking for. The unknown future causes stress, and stress and anxiety will indeed be a part of it. This is the life of a saint.

Just ask the older saints next to you – those who are adults – who have kids or grown kids. The anxiety about the future is much the same but very different. We worry about what we cannot control (for some reason). We worry about what we have created, what we have

done, what we have worked so hard to cover up (kids you may have experienced this too). We worry about our kids or grandkids. We wonder and worry about what will become of them – what will become of us. The mortgage, the employment, the situation with friends and family – we can't name them all. People create stress and anxiety for us and we do a good job, in our sins, in our selfishness, in our missteps of creating even more of it for ourselves and the ones we love. God's saints gathered today are also sinners. There is no excuse for us. Tears flow from the eyes of the sinner/saints of today because of our transgressions and the transgressions of others. The Lord tells us when those tears will stop flowing.

What does your future look like, oh saints of God? I guess that would depend on what future we are talking about. There is the unknown and there is the known. There is the time on this side of eternity and then there is the time to come. One thing we can be sure of; in both, God will bless us. In one we will have that blessing with tears and in the other, there will be no more tears, "*God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*"

Today is our All Saints Day celebration and we remember "the saints" – those who have gone before us to the place where there are no more tears – and those who were made saints with water and the Word at the font of Holy Baptism. Also, a part of this celebration is the remembrance of the many martyrs who have gone to heaven – dying for their faith. This day has been celebrated in the Christian Church since about the year 360 A.D. and stands for us as not a time to glorify the dead or praise the living – but to be reminded of the picture of heaven and the promise of life given by our Lord. It's the same life that these saints before us have today. It's the future for all of us where there is no anxiety and the promises that are given are "for sure". It's the confidence that heaven is really the blessed place of anticipation where there are no more tears and all anxiousness subsides.

Let's look back. How has life treated you? Are you pessimistic about the future because the past has been not so hot? Do we anticipate great changes for our country with this coming election – or – are we more worried than ever regarding the result? Past events may cause us future concern.

Look at those past events listed in your bulletin – funerals. At those funerals were tears. There were tears of joy and tears of sorrow. Either way, there were tears at every one of them. Why? You know why. We miss them, we love them, we are sad not to have them here in the ways we have known for so long – sorrow. But joy as well. We know the blessings of those who die in the faith. We know they have no more tears. They have the blessedness of eternal salvation John describes in the text for today. We know it for them. Beloved, be confident of it for yourselves.

Because you, like that other list we have this morning, are among the saints called by God at your baptisms. You are blessed and filled with grace. This is yours and it's a future hope we can count on no matter what. You are saved by what Jesus did 2,000 years ago – even in the midst of future anxieties. You can be confident and you can be sure. I really do hope that that past event really does form your future life – in how you live, in what you say, in what you can always be sure of. For All the Saints, the past work of Jesus is your hope for a future. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.