

November 6, 2016
Sermon for All Saints' Day
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Various Biblical Texts

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

There is a lot of counting going on in Scripture, and it starts out right *“in the beginning.”*

“In the beginning,” when God creates the heavens and the earth, the days are carefully counted as they unfold: *“And there was evening and there was morning, the first day,”* all the way up to *“the seventh day”* when *“God finished his work”* (Genesis 1:5; 2:2).

Much later, before God destroys the sin-filled world with a flood, animals are counted as they enter Noah's ark, two by two—and Noah and his family no doubt counted those long days in the ark.

Centuries later, God brings the patriarch Abraham outside and tells him to start counting the stars. *“So shall your offspring be,”* God promises; Abraham will have that many descendants, as many as the stars, and through him all nations would be blessed (Genesis 15:5). When Abraham's descendants can still be counted—they number only 70 people—they move to Egypt to escape famine in Israel.

Once in Egypt they multiply, according to Exodus *“so that the land was filled with them”* (Exodus 1:7). When God's people are oppressed and enslaved there, God leads them out to freedom, and at that time they are counted again. By this time the people of Israel number *“about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children”*, again, according to God's Word in Exodus. (Exodus 12:37).

The years were counted too—the people had lived in Egypt for 430 years, but when the time was right, God led them out into freedom and into their own land.

On the way through the wilderness, they are counted yet again, this time numbered for war. The Book of Numbers, which—as you can tell from its title—is all about counting, tells us that 603,550 men in Israel were able to go to war (Numbers 1:46).

God had promised Abraham that through him all nations would be blessed.

The promise was repeated again and again, down through the centuries in the words of the prophets. God would send His Anointed One, His Messiah, a Savior who would be born among Abraham's descendants. When the time came for that promise to be fulfilled, the counting in Scripture begins again. This time it is an earthly ruler who, as rulers often do, starts counting his subjects. *"In those days,"* the Gospel of Luke tells us, *"a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered"* (2:1).

And while that counting took place, Mary, the virgin betrothed to Joseph of Nazareth, gave birth to her firstborn Son, the promised Messiah, the Son of God. One...two...three...Joseph, Mary, Jesus...a little family of three was added into Caesar's count.

Long before Jesus' birth, the prophet Isaiah foretold a day when Jesus, grown to adulthood, would be counted again. The day would come when God's Anointed One would be *"numbered with the transgressors"* (Isaiah 53:12).

Two guilty, condemned thieves and Jesus, condemned yet innocent, were nailed up on crosses...one...two...three...outside of the city of Jerusalem.

As God had promised through the prophet Isaiah, on that center cross, where Jesus hung and suffered and died, *"the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations,"* was swallowed up (Isaiah 25:7). Three days later...one...two...three...Jesus came out of His tomb, never to die again.

The veil of sin, the shroud of death that covered all people—the smothering shroud of sin and death that covered you and me—was swallowed up forever in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But we're not done counting yet.

Only one person came out of the grave on that first Easter...count Him...just one.

But He was the first, the Firstfruits of a mighty harvest, a countless harvest, to follow.

Through faith in Jesus, forgiveness and eternal life are ours. One day we, too, will leave our graves as Jesus did, never to die again. Jesus promised, *“For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day”* (John 6:40).

The ancient hymn called the Te Deum prays, “Help your servants, whom you have redeemed with your precious blood. Make them to be numbered with your saints in glory everlasting.”

Through faith in Jesus Christ, we are saints—God’s holy people—right now. Through faith in Jesus we are numbered with all the saints. Faithful believers down through the centuries, our own friends and loved ones who have already fallen asleep in Jesus and are now with the Lord, they, too, are numbered with the saints.

But they, and you and I, did not achieve a place in this numbering by our own efforts; it was the Lord’s work from start to finish.

God the Father, Scripture tells us, *“qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son”* (Colossians 1:12-13).

God the Father qualified you, He delivered you, He transferred you into the kingdom of His Son—it was and is all His work and not yours.

Like the Israelites of old, we are counted in the eyes of God, numbered like an army arrayed for battle, prepared for the earthly struggle and warfare we now endure. In the vision of Revelation the number is 144,000, a perfect and complete number—twelve times twelve—twelve being the number of God’s people—times one thousand.

Not a limited, earthly number, but a sign and symbol that everyone who should be there is there, everyone chosen by God in Christ is present and accounted for.

As Jesus said, *“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day”* (John 6:39).

Until that great day, we are ready with our marching orders, ready to move out in love and service toward others, prepared to move out as witnesses for the Lord who saved us.

Finally, on that last day when Jesus our King returns, we will be raised up from our graves as He was.

We will be numbered with the saints in light, numbered among a *multitude “that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands”* (Revelation 7:9).

We will join that countless host in crying out in joy, *“Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb! ... Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen”* (Revelation 7:10, 12).

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.