

Sermon for November 7th: Giving Thanks for the Saints

Lesson: Revelation 21:1-7 The New Heaven and the New Earth

21 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; ⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.’

5 And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.’ ⁶ Then he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children

Sermon: Gratitude for the Saints

It’s hard not to be humbled by these candles. For each candle represents someone who is loved and someone who is missed. All Saint’s day celebrates their lives, but more importantly it celebrates their new lives. For you and I we believe there is more. More after life on earth, more after death. We believe in the risen Jesus Christ, who promises an eternal life with him. As he stated in his last speech to his friends *14 ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. 2 In my Father’s house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.* We believe and we cling to that promise, especially on days like this. Days we need reminded of that promise, because as we look at these candles we feel as though we have lost so much.

But with our faith, we can know our loved ones are blessed with a new life. In fact, I am going to suggest that on a day like today, we need to give thanks. Give thanks for those people who have made a difference in our lives. Give thanks for the new life they now live.

In today’s lesson, we hear an amazing gift we are to be thankful for, especially on this day. It is a gift from God that spells out our after life in Christ. John Wesley wrote of Revelation, “I by no means pretend to understand, or explain all that is contained in this mysterious book”. Revelation can be difficult to follow and understand and unfortunately many have used and continue to use it for scare tactics. But I don’t see it that way. Let me explain:

First off let us recognize it is a form of literature known as Apocalyptic- *apo* is the Greek word meaning *from* and *kalypsis* means *covering*. Apocalyptic is an uncovering, a revealing of something otherwise unknown. And this type of literature has certain features: There is a division of history into old and new ages. A conflict between good and evil. It also includes code words, numerology, and cryptic symbols. And there is always a revelation which communicates a hidden knowledge by variety of means like visions and dreams that transport the viewer to another realm. For the book of Revelation the visions and dreams occur to a Christian follower named John who wrote Revelation while a political prisoner of Domitian, the Roman emperor, on the island of Patmos around 92-96 Common Era. And while he is there he has these visions and dreams and what they come down to is God is challenging the Church to be strong against the Roman culture, be strong in believing God’s victory over evil and death. So there are visions of beasts, visions of wars and battles, visions of the coming of Jesus, and a new beginning. *21 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.*

And with this newness comes God. ³ *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; ⁴ he will*

wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.'

With this literature John gives us a glimpse of what the heavenly realm is like. In heaven John says that God acts as an eternal pastor, in a place of healing because *Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.'* V 4 In heaven our loved ones are blest, and isn't that a nice thought on a day like this? To know that they have no suffering, no pain, no sorrow. They have a God who wipes away their tears and says, *To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.* ⁷*Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.* Don't you love those words, "those who conquer" meaning those who mastered, triumphed, succeeded, overcame. While we feel as though we have lost everything, in seeing these loved ones go, the truth is, they have gained so much.

These candles represent those who conquered- they conquered pain and sorrow, they conquered tears, troubles, and death for new life. Now they are God's and we must celebrate that for them. We must celebrate *with* them in this new creation of heaven and earth that our Savior has given us. And it seems to me that is the best way to remember them is on this All Saint's Day, giving thanks for newness of life.

Now I know each one of you have your stories regarding your saints we will name today. For some it was a beloved parent who raised you by making sacrifices to provide for you and teaching you life skills. For others it was a spouse or a sibling that showed you the power of unconditional love. And for others it was someone who touched your heart, your life, and today you remember them and honor God for the gift of them.

I have someone like that today too. His name was Russ. The first time I met Russ Kressler, was when I moved into our parsonage at Lightstreet. He and his wife, Shirley came over to check in and see if everything was alright. It was at that point he told me about the parsonage, it's history, what the church had done to it, what they will be working on next, which at that point was a new front porch. And then he ended it by saying if I need anything not to hesitate to call him, he was the Chair of the Trustees and he can get things done. Boy he wasn't kidding. In the time I was there Russ was key to burning our mortgage for our community center, installing cameras, screens, and computers to keep us tech savvy and connected to each other. He kept light fixtures working, bathrooms functioning and up to date, and the parsonage, well it was a home built in the early 1900's and he retired the whole thing to keep the pastor and their family safe and sound. But that's not all. Besides working at the church, he volunteered the rest of his time to serving this community. Russ delivered Meals on Wheels, he enjoyed visiting with the people he would drop the food off to. On Wednesdays Russ would go to the local grocery stores in the morning and was handed the day old baked goods, that he then transported to a local ministry to the those in need in our area that gave a free lunch on Thursdays. He worked on Habitat Humanity for years, helped his neighbors, his relatives, his friends. Supported the local animal resource centers, and even fed and cared for the various wild animals at his homestead. To be honest, I couldn't believe all that he did, and I certainly couldn't figure out how he did it all, but eventually I found out.

I found out when he and I were asked to come to the home of parishioner who was dying and wanted to leave her home to our church. We met with her and before I had the opportunity to do my part and minister to her, I witnessed Russ ministering to her, and I simply sat back and learned. He said to her, "I know you recognize you are going to pass soon, but I want to tell you something, I don't want you to be scared. You see a few years back I died on the table. And when I did I experienced the most unbelievable feeling." He said "It was so peaceful and bright. I didn't see anyone, but I knew they were there. And my body, well I just felt so good. So good, I didn't want to leave. But before I knew it, I was back on the table." He finished with "I know what you are going to. And I can't wait to get back there. Until then, I do what I can to serve Him (as he pointed up) and that wonderful place."

Friends, today may we honor the saints here with thankful hearts for the lessons they gave, the memories we share, and may we give thanks to God who blessed them with everlasting life.