

Jesu Juva

“All the Saints”

Text: Revelation 7:2-17; Matthew 5:1-12; 1 John 3:1-3

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The first part of this past week I was down in Florida to attend the quarterly Board of Trustees meetings for the Lutheran Haven, our District's adult care community. The trip started like all the others, but quickly changed when I arrived. For as I got into the car that picked me up at the airport, I was told that one of the old retired pastors that lived on campus, named Oscar, had tragically died. He was riding his bike -probably on his way to McDonald's for coffee -and was crossing a pretty good sized road when he was hit by a car. You see, it was at exactly that time of the morning when the sun is coming up over the horizon and when you're driving - as most of you know and have experienced - that light can come right through your windshield, hit you right in the eyes, and suddenly blind you. And you can't see anything.

So it was for a 21 year old young lady, a member of the same congregation as this 90 year old retired pastor. She suddenly couldn't see. She couldn't see him right in front of her car and hit him. Almost right in from of the Haven campus.

The community was pretty shaken, as you can imagine. There was a prayer service in the afternoon. And at this prayer service, I was told that this old pastor - whom I did know - would always say, whenever one of the folks there would die, that we shouldn't be sad, but rejoice! For our brother or sister in Christ is now at peace and rest; is now with our Saviour. And the people smiled at that; at this good news. And knew that so now it was for the one who always spoke those words, for Oscar. So they would rejoice for him. Even in their sadness and shock, they would rejoice for their old friend.

That's what All Saints Day is all about.

But it's not just about that. It's about more than that too. For All Saints Day is not just about the saints in the next life, but all the saints, including the saints who live now. The saints who still live on earth. *You*. All three of the readings we heard today spoke about that. This dual reality. And that good news was demonstrated this week at the Haven also
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For Oscar's widow and family, in the midst of their pain, shock, and sorrow, weren't just thinking of and concerned for themselves - in fact, they were *even more concerned* for someone else . . . for that 21 year old young lady who hit and killed their husband and father. *They* reached out to *her*. *They* wanted to comfort and care for

her. As did the whole community. Saints doing what saints do. Showing the love and compassion of Christ. Rejoicing in the transfer of the one to the Church Triumphant, and caring for the ones who remain in the Church Militant.

That, too, you see, is what All Saints Day is all about.

All the saints, from every people, tribe, nation, and language - but one Church. All the saints, living here or living there - but one Church. All the saints, from the very oldest to the very youngest, in one Church. All the saints, baptized into and together in Christ.

And that's what we rejoice in today. This fellowship we have that not even death can end.

The reading from Revelation today spoke of this one Church. It was kind of a tedious reading though, wasn't it? 12,000 from this tribe, 12,000 from that tribe . . . couldn't we have just skipped over those verses, Pastor? Well, yes, but they serve a purpose. For though the numbers in Revelation are symbolic numbers and not literal numbers (sorry Jehovah's Witnesses!), they do tell us that the people of God on earth, the saints on earth, are numbered. The saints in heaven? They are ***a great multitude that no one could number!*** But the saints on earth . . . God knows precisely how many; God knows every one. None will fall through the cracks. None will be forgotten. *You* will not be forgotten.

And the names of the tribes? Well, they're instructive too. We're not all the same. And like these twelve sons of Jacob, some of us have pretty colorful backgrounds! So of all those tribes, what tribe are you from? Maybe Reuben, who shamed his father and his family. Maybe you've done some shameful things in your life. Or maybe you're from the tribes of Simeon and Levi, bold in their sin, those two. And maybe you've been a pretty bold sinner, too. Or Joseph, who languished in prison and felt forgotten. Or Benjamin, the smallest. Insignificant. Or maybe you're from the tribes of the sons born to the maidservants - those who don't really fit in.

But all these, we find out, are among the saints. All these together in one holy Church. For all are forgiven, by grace through faith, in their Saviour. Like you. For them, He hadn't come yet - they were still looking forward and waiting for this promised Messiah. For us, Jesus has come. But it is the same faith for us all - just different sides of the cross. It is the same forgiveness for us all - the forgiveness that joins us to Christ; the forgiveness that makes us saints.

Saints, though you may not look or act like a saint now. Those twelve colorful sons of Jacob didn't always look or act like saints - maybe they never did! - but you are, not because of what you do, but because God says so. His word does what it says. His word in the beginning that created all things out of nothing also creates saints out of sinners. His Word which you heard again today: *I forgive you all your sins* . . . or to put that in other words, in creation words: *Let there be saints*. And there were saints. Saints blessed

by God.

Which is what Jesus told us in the reading from Matthew. ***Blessed are you.*** Nine time he said it. ***Blessed are you.*** Almost like He's trying to convince us of the fact. And maybe He is. 'Cause if you're like me, you don't feel blessed a lot of the time. In fact, you feel under fire a lot of the time. You feel attacked, threatened, unsure, worried, depressed, worn out, used up, empty - everything but blessed. Welcome to the Church Militant.

For that's what it's like for the saints on earth. The book of Hebrews (11:36-38) tells us that *some suffered mocking and flogging, chains, and imprisonment. Others were stoned, sawn in two, and were killed with the sword. Some went about in the skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, and mistreated.* And what are we told of those this happened to? *The world was not worthy of them* (v. 38). The truth is that saints will come under enemy fire, and sometimes even friendly fire!

But ***blessed are you.*** Blessed are you when you are worn out and used up. Blessed are you who forgive. Blessed are you who show mercy to others, even to those who persecute and mistreat you. Blessed are you who resist temptation and stand up for the truth. Blessed are you who get walked on so much you have athlete's scalp! Blessed are you who mourn with the mourners. Blessed are you who are cursed and belittled for your faith. Blessed are you who know that *this* is not your kingdom, but that yours is the kingdom of heaven.

And you really are blessed - this is not just wishful thinking. John reminded us that ***what we will be has not yet appeared.*** Who we are now is hidden. But when He appears we shall see. When He appears we shall be like Him. When He appears, we shall see Him as He is.

The Apostles struggled with this too. When Jesus was being rejected and mistreated, as Jesus was hanging on the cross, He didn't look like the Son of God! But when the Son rose, when the Son rose from the dead, then they could see Him as He is.

And so for you and me, in rejection and mistreatment, bearing the cross, falling into sin - we may not look much like saints. But when the Son rises and His light hits us in the eyes, we won't be blinded by the light, we will finally be able to see! To see Him as He is, and to see *for us* what He has promised all along. And there won't be death, only life.

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. You are.

They are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation; you are still in it. We feebly struggle, they in glory shine (LSB #677 v. 4).

But though you struggle, you are among the number who *have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*. The stains of your sin have been washed away. For the Lamb of God, the Saviour of sinners, Jesus, has come for you and died for you. And His blood poured over you in the waters of Holy Baptism have washed you and made you a child of God. His blood poured over you in the words of the Absolution and of the Gospel continue to wash you and keep you in that great multitude that no one could number. And His blood along with His body now given to you in the bread and wine of Holy Communion not only wash you but also gathers the whole Church of Christ around His throne. For here you join not just your fellow members of Saint Athanasius, but *the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven*. Or in other words, **all the saints**. Including 90 year old retired pastors now residents of heaven, and 21 year old young ladies who struggle on with us.

And maybe, just maybe in this fellowship, we get a glimpse of the glory that will be revealed on the last day. A glimpse of the glory of our Saviour *shining through us* in this one holy and apostolic church. A glimpse of the glory of a Saviour who laid down His life for us, as we lay down our lives for others.

It is just a glimpse though, for the day is still coming when the Son is going to come up over the horizon in all His brilliance and the glory of His light hits us in the eyes. When *the yet more glorious day breaks, and the saints triumphant rise in bright array*. And we will not be blinded, but see and rejoice in our Saviour who was with us on the way, who has returned to take us home, and *who will wipe every tear from the eyes* of a widowed pastor's wife, from the eyes of a traumatized 21 year old young lady, and from your eyes too. And *all the saints will from their labors rest* (LSB #677).

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.