

2020 All Saints Day Rev. 7:9-17

Reformation and All Saints Day are back to back festivals in the Church Year. It's logical since Luther nailed his Theses on the Wittenberg Church door on All Hallows Eve, we call that Halloween now, but it's the Eve of All Hallows or All Saints Day. The Day the Church remembers those who have gone before us in the faith. So these festivals line up in a row chronologically, but also thematically. If I can say it this way: Reformation Day is where we learn how to get to heaven; All Saints Day is where we learn what heaven is like.

We don't know a lot about heaven, but we know it's real, and the place of God's Throne where his people's souls go after death to await the resurrection when they are reunited body and soul to celebrate and live in the new creation forever.

Where is this heaven? Well, it isn't behind a cloud, or behind Mars for that matter. No space ship will ever get there. It's outside of, or behind, the fabric of space/time that our Lord created. You get there, as we mentioned last week, by grace through faith in Jesus who, as he promises his disciples that he goes to prepare a place and will bring us to himself (John 14). Jesus gets us to heaven. And since it is outside space and time, well, that means it's kind of hard to say what they are doing up there all this time. The saints, long dead for a hundred, for thousands of years...

are they bored, are they playing cards while they wait, are they sleeping? I imagine time is a bit different there. Hard to say.

In fact it is hard to say a lot of things about heaven. But that doesn't mean we can't say anything at all. Aren't you relieved? Otherwise the sermon would be over already and that would be tragic! But in all seriousness, it is a good thing we can say a few things about heaven because it can give us great comfort. That is the whole purpose of the book of Revelation, it is why John, the apostle, gets his vision or tour of heaven. So he can tell it to the Church to give them comfort.

Comfort because, as our text reminds us, we live in a great tribulation. An oppression, a place and time of pressure. We have much to be thankful for, no doubt, but are we without tribulation? Are we without depression, sickness, pain, heartache, discord, and death? No, I think we all know we aren't.

And that's all been around since the fall. Certainly the Churches in the Roman Empire who got this letter had tribulation. There is some debate whether John got this vision, and subsequently wrote down this book, during Nero's reign, just after it, or during Emperor Domitian's rule. But I think "Tribulation" would apply in any of the cases. Nero was well known for his persecution of Christians in Rome, often lighting his backyard garden with the burning bodies of crucified Christians while he took a leisurely stroll. Domitian wasn't as bloodthirsty toward Christians

but is well attested as referring to himself as “Dominus et deus,” which any of our Latin Students, since we covered these vocabulary words, could tell you means: “Lord and god.” Have fun voting for him. Yet even now, as our brothers and sisters struggle with persecution in the global east and south, as three Christians got decapitated in France this week, we ought muster up a prayer of thanksgiving that the trials we face are of a different caliber. That our tribulation is less great, but, yes, it’s around nonetheless.

The Good News abounds, however, for all God’s people. This letter gives us great comfort. Because those in Rome, or Africa, or here in Idaho, are soon brought to the throne room of God, where the great multitude gathers. Different shapes, sizes, colors, and languages – all will give praise to God for his Work – for there is one human race – we do well to remember this. And they don’t seem bored to me nor are they jockeying for better spots in the crowd. Not at all. In fact they are waving palm branches - the textbook party decoration in the ancient world. And so the tribulation has given way to unity and celebration. That sounds like an upgrade to me.

The throne is there with God on it, the Lamb - we know who that is, right? The One who was slain for our salvation, Jesus. He is there too. The Father is not

described, some things I guess are just impossible to put in words, I imagine. And the Spirit, while not listed in this section, make no mistake, He is there, One with the Father and the Son, and present where the praises of God are sung. John refers to his seven-fold presence in chapters 1 and 3 in the book of Revelation. So to be in heaven is to be in the presence of God.

Lest we think this a little thing or just a side-perk of eternal life, as long as he doesn't drop by too often and spoil the party. Let us remember our court decorum. Did one wander into the presence of the King? Not unless one wanted to be a head shorter. Or do we often stroll the white house grounds uninvited? Even more our King is the king who fought for us, who did what we could not, who shed his blood for his soldiers, what King does this? And what soldier is not inspired by the presence of that King who bled and died for them, then rose again. Yes, when you think of heaven, don't just think of grandpa, or grandma, think of the King as well! That is no small invitation, and a high price was paid for it. The price of the Son's life. To disregard it would be... foolish.

But these are not fools before the throne of God. They are wise unto salvation and have been washed clean by the blood of the lamb our text tells us. Does blood make your whites whiter? The Blood of Jesus does. The robe of righteousness has been given to them along with their invitation and so they stand undefiled, unharmed, celebrating. All they did was passively receive the gifts the King

offered, that's what faith is, the thing that says, "The cross, the empty tomb, the invitation to heaven, the coming resurrection, that's all for me?" Faith says, "Yes, it really is." And there is nothing else to do but rejoice.

Which, once again, is what the people of God are doing. Which of them are bickering about whose tribulation was worse? "I got crucified" says one, Another says, "I went to Church in a catacomb while that American barely could get out of bed to make it to church." "I had chronic pain," another said, "I died young!" Who is claiming their treatment is unfair? Who is resenting another party goer? Who is bickering about God's justice? Answer: No one. Because they know what they deserved and it wasn't to be at this party, but they stand in awe and joy because the King is so merciful.

This is what awaits the people of God. A celebration in the throne room of the King. It's why I can tell the 90 year old shut-in that he has good days ahead of him. And that is no lie. It's why when your world is upside down I can say, "you have a future." And that is not just wishful thinking. It is why, at the funeral I can tell that mourning family, "You will see them again." And that is no coping mechanism. And it is why I can tell you today that the Lamb has won for you a spot at the celebration! It's free, it's sealed in his blood. And that is not too good to be true. It simply is true. Praise be to the King who wins for us and all his people a great salvation and a place of rest and joy. Amen.

