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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

All Saints' Day

November 1, 2015

Text: Revelation 7:15–17; I John 3:1–3

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I always find the contrast between Reformation Sunday and All Saints' Sunday to be most striking. Last Sunday, Reformation Sunday, we heard the call to be vigilant in the gospel of the glory and grace of God. We can never rest on our laurels when it comes to the gospel. The devil, the world, and our sinful nature incessantly seek to corrupt the Lord's gospel. Even though the gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe (Rom. 1:16), the wisdom of the world considers it foolishness and a stumbling block (I Cor. 1:18–25). The devil, the world, and our sinful natures constantly seek to overthrow and corrupt God's precious gospel of forgiveness, life, and eternal salvation.

Martin Luther reminded us that “the true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God” (Thesis 62 of the *95 Theses*). The gospel is the good news that the Lord Jesus died to save sinners, sinners redeemed by His love and seek to live their lives in repentance, faith, and obedience. To reflect these things in our worship, our music last week was more militant and vigorous. For us, joy and peace are to be found in the heat of battle for we know that our cause is just and our victory assured in Christ.

Today's service, All Saints' Day, reminds us who we are because of the gospel. We are saints of God. Holy. Pure. Righteous. Misunderstood, maybe even hated, by the world. Dearly beloved by the God. And temples of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yes. That's who you are, right now, dear children of God. You are saints of God!! You may be thinking...Oh pastor, you wouldn't say that if you knew what I thought, or felt, or said, or did this week. My life appears to be anything but saintly. And to that I would say...Oh saint of God. I know and understand what you're saying. I too share in the same human nature. But God's Word cannot be changed and it does not lie. You are saints because of Christ's love and forgiveness and indwelling presence in your life. And so our music today is joyous. Our praise exuberant. We are saints because of Jesus. Alleluias to the highest heavens!!!!

Although Reformation Sunday and all Saints' Sunday are striking in their differing tone and tenor, they are really two sides of the same thing: the gospel of the glory and grace of God. Without the gospel, there are no saints of God. And so the gospel must be taught, preached, and proclaimed in all its purity or there will be no saints, no church, no hope of the resurrection unto eternal life. Conversely, all saints, past, present, and future, are created and sustained purely by the gospel of the glory and grace of God. And so God's saints—past and present – gather wherever the gospel is proclaimed in all its truth and purity. They do together, not just in late October and early November, but at all times and in all places.

Today's service exemplifies this transcendent characteristic of God's gospel in a unique manner. What I'm referring to specifically is that God's saints gather together around the gospel regardless of time and location. God's saints, earthly and heavenly, rejoice with us in the gospel. You're here. That's the most obvious proof. The Word and Sacrament are proclaimed and God's earthly saints are here to receive these gifts. But today, we also remember and commemorate our church members who have died since All Saints' Sunday, last year. Because of the gospel of God's grace and glory, we believe and take comfort in the knowledge that (*IM: Arva Steege, Kay Schliske, and Bob Wisroth*) Leo Buddeck, Elmer Bogert, Bentley Graves, and Nancy Smith are rejoicing with us.

That's a most remarkable claim. Maybe it startles you a bit. But we make that glorious claim every week during our communion liturgy, specifically, the Proper Preface. You'll recognize it. The Proper Preface begins with "It is truly good, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to you, Holy Lord, almighty Father..." And then it concludes with these amazing words, "Therefore with angels and archangels *and with all the company of heaven* we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising You and saying..." Angels and archangels join us. But also "all the company of heaven" which includes (*IM: Arva, Kay, and Bob*) Leo, Elmer, Bentley, Nancy, and every saint who died in the victory of Jesus.

That's an astounding claim!! We need to have the assurance of God's Word that it's true. Listen to what the writer to the Hebrews proclaims to God's people (12:22–24):

<sup>22</sup>But you (*this refers to God's saints gathered in a worship service to hear preaching and receive the Sacraments*) have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, <sup>23</sup>and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in

heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect (*this refers to all the saints in heaven*), <sup>24</sup>and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Wherever God's Word is proclaimed and His Sacraments are rightly administered, there God's saints, earthly and heavenly, are gathered together. We are never truly and completely separated from our dear brothers and sisters in Christ. They are with Jesus even as we are with Jesus. Sometimes I chuckle to myself when I record worship attendance. I do that, with the ushers' assistance for any number of reasons. At times, I ask myself "How do we account for the heavenly saints and angels who worshipped with us?" Revelation 7:9 says that the heavenly host is "a great multitude that no one could number."

All of God's people are united together in Christ Jesus. That is why we confess that there is only one, holy Christian and apostolic Church. The visible separations between Christian denominations are lamentable but they do not separate us from the Lord Jesus and His justified saints. Wherever God's gospel is proclaimed, there God's saints will be.

Today's first reading from Revelation 7:15–17 gives us a further description of the departed saints gathered around God's throne.

<sup>15</sup>"Therefore they (*the ones who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb*) are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. <sup>16</sup>They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. <sup>17</sup>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."

Our departed loved ones are rejoicing before God's throne with the Lord Jesus and they are sheltered, loved, blessed, and joyous beyond human imagination. Jesus forever takes away their sorrow and adversities and replaces them with His joy and resurrection life. Take comfort in their victory and may it inspire you in your daily walk of repentance, faith, and obedience.

But some of you may still be struggling with how you can be considered God's saints. Today's epistle reading from I John 3:1–3 describes who you are right now. Though

John doesn't use the language of sainthood, he is describing your present status and your future hope in Christ.

<sup>1</sup>See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are (*present tense*). The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. <sup>2</sup>Beloved, we are God's children now (*to be a saint is to be God's child, and notice the emphasis on 'now'*), and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. <sup>3</sup>And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

Our enduring hope is that we will be like the resurrected Jesus, no longer subject to sin and slavery and separation and sorrow of any kind. And all you who have that hope, are, according to John, as pure as the Lord Jesus is pure! Well, if I can't call you a saint of God because of that promise of God's Word, then I don't know what I'm supposed to call you.

This week and last week, and really every Sunday, are celebrations of the same glorious truth: the gospel of the glory and grace of God. Your struggle may be intense. That changes nothing. You are saints of God because you are cleansed by the blood of Jesus and hope in His promises of grace and future glory. A blessed and joyous All Saints' Day to all of you, dear saints of God!!

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.