

Pastor Kenneth Mars
Immanuel Lutheran Church – Burns, WY
The Feast of All Saints (transferred – dual parish service @ 4 p.m.)
November 5, 2017
Text: Matthew 5:1–12

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons (Phil. 1:1).

To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father (Col. 1:2).

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:1–2).

To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:7).

To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (I Cor. 1:2–3).

To the church of God and holy saints of the Lord Jesus Christ who are in Burns and Kimball: Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I quoted from the NT, 6 apostolic greetings to Christian congregations. I did so to emphasize and refresh within our minds something that is true of us and yet is probably most difficult for us to understand rightly. In Christ Jesus and solely because of Christ Jesus, we are holy saints of God. You and I, and all baptized believers in Christ, are declared to be righteous in the sight of God the Father almighty because we are cleansed by the holy blood of Jesus. Our Lord's blessed righteousness is imputed to you, credited to you in what Luther called the blessed exchange. St. Paul describes the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us and our sin and evil to Jesus in II Corinthians 5:21, "For our sake (God the Father) made (Christ Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in (Jesus) we might become the righteousness of God." In Jesus, you are saints, the blessed, holy ones described in the Beatitudes of Matthew's gospel.

Revelation 7 describes the great cloud of saintly witnesses that surrounds us and all of Christ's holy Church. Those saints gathered around God's throne have already come out of the great tribulation. They are clothed in white robes and rejoice before Christ the Lamb of God who took away their sins. All their tears have been wiped away for Christ Jesus is in their midst. He is their resurrected and glorified shepherd who now guides them to streams of living water. Because of Jesus and His justifying work completed on their behalf, they, even now, are rejoicing in their victory over death, Satan, and the grave.

Dear saints of God, today we rejoice in their victory. And we comfort and encourage each other with the sure and certain hope that we too will join them around God's throne when the Lord Jesus calls us home to our eternal inheritance. Jesus was faithful in preserving them in their most holy faith while they lived in this vale of tears, so our dear Lord will preserve us in the same. Encourage one another by reminding all our brothers and sisters in Christ that He is faithful; Jesus will complete the good work of salvation in us. Weeping may endure for a while, but joy comes. And the joy of the Lord is our strength. Christ Jesus is our new song of salvation.

In the Christian Church, there are no true and lasting goodbyes. For those who die in Christ are alive. And they join us in worshipping God the Holy Trinity for they are part of the "angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven" who "laud and magnify Christ's glorious name, ever more praising Him" who died and rose again. Our risen Lord holds the keys of Death and Hades. He opens, and no one closes. He closes, and no one shuts. So, the saints of all ages past join with us today. For wherever Christ is, there His saints are too. They are part of the cloud of witnesses that surrounds us. We do not see them with our natural eyes. But we see them through faith informed by God's holy and precious Word.

We join them for we too are part of that great company of saints. Yet, we remain in that time John, in his Revelation, calls the great tribulation. Our fight against sin, evil, and condemnation continues. We live by faith in the same Lord Jesus whose promises sustain us even as they preserved the saints of ages past. According to Jesus, we are the ones who mourn over our sin, who continue to hunger and thirst for righteousness as our primary food, who seek peace and reconciliation, who are merciful even when reviled and persecuted, who long to see God with redeemed and resurrected eyes; though poverty-stricken because of our sinful nature, we are comforted with a joy unspeakable and filled with the glory of forgiveness. And all the blessed promises of God's new heaven and new earth, His comfort, His abundant grace that satisfies us

with the righteous feasting of heaven, the Father's mercy, the privilege of seeing God without fear and shame, the status of being sons of God, are all ours now by faith. At the resurrection of the Last Day, we will experience those promises in all their fullness. Rejoice and be glad, dear saints of God, for Christ Himself says that your reward is great in heaven.

And so we confess with the apostle Paul, "For us to live is Christ, and to die is gain." To live now is to receive Christ's love and promises in faith through the Gospel. To die is to see Jesus and join the multitude of redeemed saints from all ages. The reason why the world does not understand us Christians is that it does not understand Jesus. For us, life and death are all about Jesus and the fulfillment of His promises. This world can harm us none for to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Knowing that we are His redeemed people, we step out into the world declaring "we have a righteousness not of ourselves that would cause us to boast in ourselves. Our boasting is in Christ Jesus alone. Our righteousness and hope comes through faith in Jesus. In the power of His death and resurrection, we know Him and are being made conformable unto Him so that we may attain the glorious resurrection of the just on the Last Day. We forgiven saints are not complete nor perfect, for we know and feel the sting of sin and the accusing voice of the Law. But we press on to make this great inheritance of God's eternal kingdom our own in the confidence that Christ has made us His own. Because we are cleansed by the blood of Jesus and made saints by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we forget the sins and failures of the past in repentance and faith. Those sins and evils are washed away in the blood of the Lamb; He has spoken on our behalf. We strive with all the grace and power of the Holy Spirit to the glory that lies ahead, the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. This is the way we Christians, we saints of God, think. For we hold on with might and manure to what we have attained in and through the Lord Jesus Christ (paraphrase of Phil. 3:9–16).

It is my goal in this sermon to instill one thing in your hearts and minds. You are saints of God in Christ Jesus united together with all the saints of God, now, tomorrow, and for eternity. Our enduring hope is that we will share in the resurrection life of the risen Lord Jesus. At the great resurrection of the Last Day, we will no longer be subject to the oppression of sin and slavery, separation and sorrow. All of you who have that hope in Christ are as pure as the Lord Jesus is pure! Or to put it differently, you are saints of God, members of the great cloud of witnesses who are coming out of the great tribulation to join the great multitude of white robed believers who sing, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Blessed are you dear saints of God. To God alone be all glory, power, and honor ...

✠ 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.