

If Death ends it All, then evil must be Good.

All Saints Sunday

Text: Revelation 7:9-17

1 John 3:1-3 (Series A, All Saints Sunday) Ps. 34:1-10, 22

Matthew 5:1-12

After this I looked, and there was an enormous crowd—no one could count all the people! They were from every race, tribe, nation, and language, and they stood in front of the throne and of the Lamb, dressed in white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. They called out in a loud voice: "Salvation comes from our God, who sits on the throne, and from the Lamb!" All the angels stood around the throne, the elders, and the four living creatures. Then they threw themselves face downward in front of the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Praise, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honour, power, and might belong to our God forever and ever! Amen!"

Let us pray:

Have you ever been in a large crowd, I mean, a really large crowd? It is believed that the greatest number of spectators for any sporting event is 10 million over a three-week period at the annual Tour de France cycling race.

All over the world, people gather in large crowds for many purposes, but as exciting as some of those gatherings might be, they are pale compared to the huge crowd of Revelation 7.

Try to imagine this massive crowd of people in heaven. People from every *walk of life, every culture, every nationality* - so many people that they cannot be numbered. This isn't one of those uncomfortable crowds; people pushing and shoving, people jammed in together, some being rude, and some stepping on your toes.

Those gathered at the throne of God don't mind the crowd at all. In fact, they are happy to be part of so many people enjoying the presence of God. They come from all kinds of backgrounds, even speak different languages, but here there is no division. They understand one another perfectly; they are as one.

The closest I can come to imagining what this is like is comparing it to a worship service at a National Church convention. Gathered in a great convention hall are people from all over the country – a huge crowd – and the singing, the atmosphere, the worship is something out of this world.

That is nothing compared to the crowd gathered around the throne – the worship, the singing, the atmosphere, the joy will really be out of this world. John, the writer of Revelation, had seen a vision of what heaven is like and he is trying to put into words what he saw.

There are no words that can adequately described what is beyond this life and the heavenly joy that belongs to all those who will gather around the throne of God.

There are so many wrong ideas about what happens after death, so much speculation, and so much fantasy about the mystery of it all. Writers and moviemakers have had a field day presenting all kinds of images of what happens after death - some pleasant, some horrifying.

Others pass it all off as a joke. They believe that there is nothing after death. Death has been so much a part of our world news lately. We hear death all over us, bomb blasts in Middle East, Russia, Ukraine, Syria, Nigeria etc. the death of hostages and terrorists in various places in our world. There is no escaping it – death is truly a part of our daily lives.

In Canada, we work very hard to avoid death. We don't, even have undertakers any more because it's too gruesome. We have *'funeral directors'*, as if somehow, we could manage or direct this powerful force called death that rips our lives apart.

Take the news paper for an example, and look at the obituary section you will discover that very few people do actually die, the rest just passed away eh! The only answer to death and its power in this world is Jesus Christ. He died and rose again to defeat the hold that death has over us.

He has promised that all who believe in him, trust him, put their confidence in him, will have eternal life. Death will not have the last say but we will have the joy of entering heaven. What do we know about heaven?

It's a place very *different* from anything we know. Different in a good sense. In John's vision of heaven, we are told that standing before the throne of God were those who had been through terrible *Ordeal*. They had experienced pain, suffering, the loss of loved ones.

The hope of eternal life has helped many people in difficult times. It has given people a reason to live as well as confidence for what lies beyond the grave. Paul had this same feeling. Listen to him: *"We are often troubled, but not crushed; perplexed, but sometimes in doubt but never in despair; there are many enemies, but we are never without a friend; and though badly hurt, we are not destroyed...."*

This small and temporary trouble we suffer will bring us a tremendous and eternal glory, much greater than the trouble. For we fix our attention, not on things that are seen, but on things that are unseen. What can be seen lasts only for a time, but what cannot be seen lasts for ever" (2 Cor 4:8,9,17,18).

The vision of heaven kept Paul's troubles in perspective. His troubles were only passing events, but the joy of heaven was forever. With that in mind he could endure anything. How many times have I sat with those whose time on this earth has been limited yet they demonstrated amazing calmness? They knew where they were going, for them *Heaven is Real*.

They focused on the joy that lay ahead of them when their Saviour will welcome them home with open arms. They looked forward to the perfect healing they will receive in heaven - their suffering be over. As Paul said, *"The troubles of this life are small and temporary compared to the great and eternal joy of heaven."*

Thelma (not her real name), a 66 year old, was confined to hospital for the last four weeks of her life. She knew her end was near. She asked to see her friends and family.

When her visitors seemed uneasy, or they started to tell her that things weren't that bad as she thought, she very calmly, yet strongly assured them, "We don't have anything to be afraid of. Parting is difficult. But I'm going to be with my Lord. So, let's cry for a while and then enjoy our time together."

Just as Thelma could rejoice in this life, it is clear that heaven will be a place of never-ending *rejoicing*. Those who gather around the throne celebrate their new life in heaven and praise the God who has made it possible for them to enjoy such a place. It is the Lamb – Jesus – who has given every believer the key to eternal life.

He has made it possible for all people of *every race, tribe, nation and language ... to stand in front of the throne of the lamb in heaven*. He wants all to be there but sadly some will not experience this joy because they reject God's offer.

"If death ends all, then evil must be good, Wrong must be right, and beauty ugliness. God is a Judas who betrays his Son, and with a kiss, damns all the world to hell--If Christ rose not again." That haunting poem was penned by an unknown soldier killed in WWII.

It reminds us of Paul's reasoning in 1 Cor. 15:12-19 which begins, "But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" and closes *"If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all people."*

Job, writing several thousand years ago articulated a question that has bothered humankind for centuries: *"If a person dies, shall he / she live again?"* And there is where we pick up the story.

Today, as we consider Jesus' statement to the good and faithful servant, our own curiosity about death and the life after will be satisfied. Jesus' statement of the resurrection: As he brought death from the shadows of darkness to the Light.

Today, we are celebrating All Saints. This is a time to remember the saints who have gone before us – those who have been made clean by the blood of the Lamb and are now celebrating with that massive crowd gathered around the throne of God. (*Church yards around Church in Europe, worshiping with the departed*).

Perhaps today reminds us of those special people in our life who have gone ahead. We remember with thanks what they have meant to us and praise God for their faith and the peace they are now experiencing.

All Saints is a time to not only reflect on the glories of heaven but also to re-examine your relationship with Jesus and vow to do something about it if you have been distant and unresponsive to the love and forgiveness God is showing you.

All Saints reminds us that the troubles of this life are temporary and that joys of heaven are eternal. All Saints calls us to reflect on our readiness if God were to call us from this life today. Jesus said, "*I am going to prepare a place for you.*" Let us praise the God who has made the hope of heaven real for us through his Son Jesus. Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven. **Amen.**

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