

All Saints Sunday, Sunday, November 3, 2019, Year C

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA:

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Revelation 7: 9-17

"Lamb, Shepherd, Savior"

What I absolutely love about All Saints celebration is that the reading from the Book of Revelation gives us an amazing glimpse into heaven and God's saints. This is a glimpse of reality. The reality is that the God the Creator of the universe and the Lamb have already won the victory, the victory which means that those who follow the Lamb are rescued from harm. The reality is that the people who claim the Lamb's protection may well have to come through a tribulation or time of trial, of great suffering, but they will then find themselves in God's throne room, worshipping and serving Him day and night with great, abundant and exuberant joy. There are a lot of people who debate about what the tribulation will be, one can say that maybe there will be persecution and great suffering, but I want to throw this out to you, as part of a tribulation. Is life easy? Is it easy to get up every day and do all of the things that you have to do without hurting, without suffering, without worry? It is a tribulation unto itself. It may not be the 'great tribulation' but certainly we can't do it alone and we need to ask for Jesus' help. Hence, 'help me Jesus!'

The Apostle John is given this wonderful vision, after having 'heard' the list of the 144,000 in verses 4-8 of chapter 7. People hear that number and worry about the number of people who will get into heaven. The 144,000 is a symbolic number of the "complete people of God," twelve times twelve times a thousand. In reality, this is such a huge throng of people which nobody could ever count. It was a very large crowd that just seems to go on forever, impossible to count and the best you could give was a "guesstimate." Think of Times Square on New Year's Eve - 'that ain't nothin!' There's a lot of people there and of course they have people out there with clickers counting, but this throng of people is so huge that they can't come up with an adequate count, so therefore it was 144,000. A very large crowd that seems to go on forever. Suffice it to say - it was a huge crowd. They were clothed in white, which signified victory and purity, and they were carrying palm branches as a further sign of victory celebration. When you think of palm branches - what do you think of? Palm Sunday - welcoming the King who they soon turned on - but we will never turn on this King. Holding the palm branches, unable to hold back their enthusiasm and so they are shouting out their delight and praise and thanks to God and to the Lamb, because they have won the victory which has brought them their rescue. The word 'salvation' that we see in verse ten really means 'rescue.' Our Savior rescues us - from the alternative. Quite often in the Old Testament the word seems to mean 'the victory through which rescue is won.' And that is what it seems to be here. The shout of praise continues, where this great crowd of the redeemed saints recognize with great joy that everything good, noble, powerful and wise only comes from God Himself. They are acknowledging that there is only one God, and so they are giving shouts of praise to the God from whom all blessings flow.

John, is in the heavenly throne room, the heavenly Temple after which the Temple in Jerusalem was modeled. John is not simply looking on from a great distance, like a fly-on-the-wall, but he is right there, with the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. One of those elders now speaks to him, asking him a question. *"Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes--*

who are they, and where did they come from?" (Revelation 7:13) The elder himself then gives John the answer. He says, and I am paraphrasing, 'they have come out of the great suffering, having lived through the nightmare and can now wake up to a glorious, fresh new morning. The reason that their clothes are white is not necessarily because they lived lives of total holiness and purity, but because the Blood of the Lamb, the sacrificial Passover-like death of Jesus Himself, has rescued them from their slavery to sin, making them able to stand in the very presence of the living God. He says that they have no need to wait, because the death of Jesus, and the suffering they have already endured, have done all that is required. God then welcomes them, into His presence. He welcomes them, and "*spread His tent over them.*" (Revelation 7:15) This is a very powerful thing, because to spread your tent is spreading your 'tabernacle' over them, just as He pitched His tent or tabernacle right in the midst of the Israelites during their wanderings in the wilderness. Doing this meant that God was incorporating them and treating them as His very own family. Don't take it lightly when you hear 'sons and daughters of God.' In other words, all of the blessings of the Temple would be theirs – and would be ours. Taking them, and all of the saints under His covering means that they will never have to worry, suffer or endure pain ever again. God will protect them from the elements, and from hunger and thirst, and they would be led to "*springs of living water.*" (Revelation 7:15). The One who promised to "*never leave or forsake you*" (Deuteronomy 31:6) and said, "*I am with you always, even to the end of the age*" (Matthew 28:20) and so many other times in both the old and New Testaments – was proving that He is as good as His promises. His presence means "*never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat.*" (Revelation 7:16) When the new heaven and earth comes – there is not going to be a need for a sun or a moon – because all of the light we will need will come from Christ Himself. How amazing and awesome is that. Not only that but God will wipe away every tear.

I want to fast forward to Revelation 21, where John sees a vision of the new heaven and the new earth. He writes, "*He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.*" *He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.*" (Revelation 21:4-5) The One seated on the throne is the One who is making His promises a reality for all eternity. He told John to write these things down to encourage those who would read them – that just as He has kept all of His promises since the very beginning of time – He will keep them for all eternity. With great authority, He now speaks these words "*It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.*" (Revelation 21:6) Those words are reminders of how Jesus said, "*whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.*" (John 7:38) When Jesus, the Lamb of God, spoke about the promise of no more pain or death – He was fulfilling the words that God spoke through the Prophet Isaiah, "*he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.*" (Isaiah 25:8)

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Looking at the Old Testament, I think it is very important for us to understand Jewish thinking of the day, and that is that the only way to become clean before Almighty God was through the sacrifice of blood. God told Moses, *“For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.”* (Leviticus 17:11) I have said this before – atonement is three words – at-one-ment – putting together again what has been separated. The Blood makes atonement for one’s life. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews put it this way, *“In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”* (Hebrews 9:22) We, as believers of Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God, know that we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all. It doesn’t happen over and over again – it happened once and that is good enough. The writer of Hebrews further clarifies that *“because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: “This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.” Then he adds: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.” And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.”* (Hebrews 10:14-18) There is no longer any requirement to offer up animals as a temporary covering for our sins! The ultimate sacrifice has already been done. That sacrifice took place on a Friday, on a hill outside the city of Jerusalem, on a hill called Golgotha.

What is so extraordinary and encouraging is that in Revelation chapter 7 we see that Jesus is no longer the Lamb to be slaughtered, but is now the Lamb at the center of the throne. The One who was sacrificed is the One whom all creation now worships. As verse 9 from Revelation 7 tells us that *“every nation, tribe, people and language”* as well as people who have suffered persecution and remained faithful will be presented to the Lamb, however this Lamb is different. This Lamb, Jesus of Nazareth, who silently and willingly gave His life as an atonement for the sin of the world, is the only One worthy to lead the people whom He died to save. We see an amazing transformation take place. In Jesus’ words recorded in John 10:11, He declares that transformation as being the Lamb, He now says, *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”* We have strength for today and a bright hope for tomorrow – because *“we listen to His voice.”* (John 10:27)

I want to close with these words of promise of the Good Shepherd, the Lamb - Jesus’ very own words from John 10:28 *“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.”*