

Sermon Title: “Apocalypse Now?”

November 1st, 2020 – All Saints Day

Text: Revelation 7

Theme:

What’s in it for me?

Sermon Text:

Grace and Peace to you from our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today is the day on the Church Calendar where we set aside the time to remember those brothers and sisters who went home to their Savior during the last year and as such, this service can seem like a second funeral, especially if you were particularly close to one or more of those who went home. The music reflects this somber mood, as do the readings from Holy Scripture. Many of the passages read today are also popular passages for funerals. So, I get why this service can feel like you’re attending a funeral, and I suppose it is appropriate that it should. We had some really fantastic sinner-saints go home to their Savior this year, and this year was particularly hard to cope given all of the restrictions, but, Christian funerals and this service aren’t necessarily supposed to be doom and gloom, they’re all about hope and comfort. And that is something we should *actually feel* quite glad about.

Our text today is one such text that is common at funerals. Revelation is one of the more popular and misunderstood texts of the Bible. If you read it through quickly, I mean, it’s easy to think that we are in for a miserable time. We have been dealing with the Coronavirus pestilence for too long now, and last night there might have been some horsemen knocking on your door, asking for candy. Reading through Revelation can be very mysterious, scary, and unnerving. Then you get another knock on your door. This time they’re not asking for candy. It’s the Jehovah’s Witnesses and they love to talk about our text today, (even though they totally misunderstand it), but they love to ask you, “Don’t you want to be one of the 144,000?” Man, with all of these sinner-saints we have been remembering, does Jesus have a “No Vacancy” sign posted on the entrance to Heaven? Well, that’s not how John’s original readers read our text for today.

The Revelation of St. John, otherwise known as The Apocalypse of St. John, meaning to “reveal what was hidden,” was written by John while in exile on the penal island of Patmos, off the coast of what is now Turkey. The Early Church unanimously believed that it was written by the Apostle John. It was written during a time when the Church was being persecuted and John had to get God’s message that was revealed to him past the Roman Guards, who were censoring his mail. How do you do that? Well,



John turned to an Old Testament form of coded writing, known as apocalyptic, to get his letter past the Roman Authorities. It is written for insiders by insiders, so insiders are able to understand the true meaning of the message, while outsiders, like the Romans and the Jehovah's Witnesses, would look at it and think that John is just a crazy old man or totally misunderstand what John was saying. Words take on a symbolic meaning, instead of a literal one. The Early Church saw great comfort in our text today, not all of the really scary stuff, so let's take a look at the text as they would have seen it. They knew the code. The Romans and the Jehovah's Witnesses don't.

Our passage for today starts out looking like it belongs in the Old Testament. It lists the tribes of Old Israel, much like the first five books of the Bible, but this list is a little different. Joseph is listed in addition to Manasseh, but his brother, Ephraim and Dan are omitted. Interesting, but what does this mean? 12 means the people of God. 10 is a complete number. When you multiply numbers in apocalyptic writing, you amplify both of their meanings. So, this is the listing of all of God's people, so the 144,000 is all of God's Old and New Testament peoples and they are sealed by Jesus' blood. Dan and Ephraim were wiped out early on, due to their rejection of God, but Jesus is preparing a place for all of us. See, Jehovah's Witnesses just don't understand the code.

Then the next part of John's vision has him looking at all of God's people. Notice how they are from every language and people. Salvation is open to all through Jesus Christ. One of the Elders, who is already in Heaven, is having a conversation with John in his vision and asks a rather rhetorical question about who all of these people are. John answers picks up on the rhetoric, confirming that the Elder already knows that these are God's Old and New Testament Peoples, coming from all over the entire Earth, and all washing away their sin in the blood of Jesus. This is a celebration, and the Early Church knew it.

So what? What does this have to do with me? What does it have to do with our brothers and sisters who died this year? Everything. This is God's reassurance that your loved ones are coming out of the difficulties they experienced in this life and have been brought home to Jesus. It's also a message for you. Sooner or later, you're going to die, unless Jesus returns first. Sooner or later, we'll be having a funeral service for you, and your loved ones will be seeking the same comfort you sought when you laid your mother, father, or grandparents to rest. Facing death can be quite frightening. For those who die in Christ, death is not the end of the story. God wants you to know that there is abundant life after death where there are no more tears, no more suffering, no more coronavirus. Jesus has all of that covered.

Yes, I know it's hard to remember your loved ones, and I know how much you love them. Whether it was a spouse, child, grandmother, grandfather, aunt, uncle, cousin, or even a close friend, know this, while the pains of separation hurt, if they died in the Lord, cling to the certain hope that they

are part of the 144,000, and so are you. You will be joining them. Jesus promised there was a place for all of you, and He's right.

No matter where you come from, no matter what you look like, how smart you are, how big your salary is, no matter what you've done, Jesus is looking to bring you home at the proper time. I know separation is painful, but Jesus will wipe away all of those tears. Instead it will be a time of peace and joy that surpasses anything you can imagine. Human language just can't do it justice.

So, when you come up to the Lord's Table today and receive Jesus' Body and Blood, know that this is a foretaste of what it to come. Jesus forgives your sins and will welcome you home too, just like He is doing for your loved ones and these brothers and sisters who preceded you.

Also, in the meantime, take some time to read through John's apocalypse, the way he meant for you to understand it. To that end, Lutheran Hour Ministries has a great online Bible Study that will help you decode and understand Revelation the way it was intended.

So, does the Coronavirus mean we are in the "end times?" Well, technically, we have been in the "end times" since Jesus' Ascension. Jesus' concept of time is far greater and much different than ours. Jesus says that He is coming, "soon," but doesn't really define what "soon" means. Instead He tells us that He is preparing a place for us, and we need to be ready.

So, yes, this service does feel kind of like a funeral. There is a similar message, but as you can see, it doesn't have to be a downer. We can show love and honor for our loved ones, but also rejoice that they are with Jesus. We can also rejoice that we will be joining them "soon." We remain here for the benefit of others. Until "soon" arrives, continue to love one another and take care of one another. Jesus desired that we be known by our love for one another. How will you show Jesus' love for one another this week?

In Jesus name,

Amen.

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