

SERMON- All Saints (A)

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Revelation 7:9-17

Psalms 34:1-10, 22

1 John 3:1-3

Good Shepherd

November 1, 2020

Matthew 5:1-12

OPENING:

It's a *treat* this year that All Saints Day falls on a Sunday because then we get to celebrate Halloween, All Hallows' Eve, back to back with the Feast of All Saints.

It might seem like a *trick* that we celebrated our Baptisms this morning with only the families and sponsors there, but know that your participation here and now makes the whole thing real for everyone.

Now more than ever, we will need a resounding "We will!" in response to the question about promising to "support these persons in their life in Christ." Now more than ever, we need your "We receive you into the household of God!" as an acclamation of our unity in One Baptism together.¹

In fact, that every All Saints Day celebrates with the communion of saints who came before,—along with those "who live not only in ages past, (the) hundreds and thousands still" right here—means that that *trick* is a yearly observance²

It becomes a *treat* because we are all knit together: those of us here in the sanctuary, those who have just been baptized off-screen outside, the saints of yesterday, and you all at home in your pajamas!

CLOTHING

This morning, we had some beautiful babies in their baptismal gowns.

That's fitting because Christian sacraments often talk about clothing as one of the symbols/ signs for your new identity—think Baptism, think weddings, think funerals.

I officiated at a wedding once where the couple happened to have both been named "Best Dressed" in their High School yearbooks. It was doubly fitting then that they chose as their scripture the passage from Colossians which talks about clothing yourself with "compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience."³

¹ *Book of Common Prayer*, pages, 303, 308.

² *Hymnal 1982*, #293, verse 3.

³ Colossians 3:12-17

As they took on that new vocation and calling, they made a pledge to put those qualities on, and not only then, but every day as a daily habit and ritual.

So it is with most of the sacraments, some other clothing is put on oneself and you make promises that: “I will, with God’s help.”⁴

So far so good.... we do these maybe without considering them... but think about how decades of self-help have told us something like the opposite:

that you are enough, that your naked self, stripped to the bone, is capable of navigating this troubled world. You hear it all the time:

“Just be you; Just be yourself.”

That may not even be horrible advice but....

Instead, as Christians, we stand together and say again:

“I will, (but) with God’s help.”

OR: *I will, with God’s help....and that of the community.*

REVELATION/HALLOWEEN

In our first reading, from the Book of Revelation, we get that famous image of the heavenly Kingdom, of that great multitude, “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples... robed in white.”⁵

What a powerful image!

Compare that to another image, this one from yesterday: that image of all the young people in their Halloween costumes going from house to house Trick or treating.

Whether or not your neighborhood got to celebrate and experience it this year makes the scene all the more relevant: that beautiful image of kids arrayed in all their different costumes, all sharing in one candied bounty, on the one night in the year where things are (usually) safe, safe enough to knock on a stranger’s doors, to get a treat that costs virtually nothing, but is a free gift that means the world to the recipient.

Is that not a glimpse of God’s kingdom?

A tiny avenue into what God’s dream might look like?⁶

⁴ *Book of Common Prayer*, 304-5.

⁵ Revelation 7.9.

⁶ “A Brief Theology of Halloween.” *The Salt Project* (October 21, 2019)

<https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/theology-of-halloween>

Think of Halloween as a mini-ritual, a sacramental action, a living out of our baptismal vows where we dress up in clothes that mock death, where we open doors without the anxiety that consumes us all too often, where we then share relationship and candy instead of fear and unknowing.

(Now I know that things can go wrong on Halloween and I will grant you that, that there can be accidents and wrongdoing and candy is bad for you, and that especially this year we needed to take precautions.)

What I won't grant is that Halloween is in anyway unchristian or Anti-Christian. Our previous Bishop of the Diocese, Shannon Johnston, wrote eloquently about how he would carve two pumpkins each October: one scary and one happy. Why? Because, he said: "Halloween is the time when Christians proclaim and celebrate the fact that (evil has) no power over us and cannot disrupt our relationship with our Lord and Redeemer."⁷

We do this by mocking those devilish forces with costumes, we lampoon and parody ghouls and ghosts and devils, proclaiming loudly and out in the open that Death does not have the final sting.

Bishop Johnston said that Halloween, therefore, is one of the "boldest Christian witnesses" because of its highly public and graphic nature.

BAPTISM:

Our reading from Revelation asks rhetorically: "Who are these, robed in white... who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb?"⁸

Now that's a spooky Halloween costume if I have ever heard of one! One that we should not be timid about it, we should boldly don our baptismal gowns..... metaphorically... and proclaim our identity for all to see!

Because the clothing we put on our baptism seals us as Christ's own forever. That's the type of clothing that is our essence, our truest self, or should be.

⁷ Bishop Shannon Johnston. "YES! HALLOWEEN IS CHRISTIAN—WONDERFULLY SO!" (Originally written for the parish of All Saints, Tupelo, Mississippi, Halloween 2005).

<http://santospopsicles.blogspot.com/2011/10/halloween-is-christian-wonderfully-so.html>

⁸ Revelations 7.13-14.

That clothing, that identity, is more important than your Sunday finest attire, or your work clothes, or your professional outfit (including the one that Christine and I wear), it's more important (dare I say) than the identity (the partisan sticker, the political tribe) that we put on Tuesday this week, that so readily consumes all of us.

NUMBERS

A final image from the Book of Revelation....so appropriate for All Saints Day, and for a year when we are surrounded by pain and death.:

“Oh when the Saints go marching in,

Lord I want to be in that number. Oh when the Saints go Marching in.”

I will admit that I have been consumed with numbers of a different sort: with poll data, with Electoral College totals, with COVID statistics, with the rain percentage forecast.

But our Revelation reading points to “numbers that cannot be numbered.”

Think of the teeming multitudes robed in white, their clothes washed from the Blood of the Lamb.

Don't think of the few, the select, the ones on my team, those of my party, those of my denomination, or the 144,000 numbered that people like to obsess over.⁹

Think of that image of Halloween trick or treaters, you could not wish to count them.

CONCLUSION

The word “saint” is used some 58 times in the New Testament.

But only once is it used in the singular, every other time it's used in the plural, meaning the communion of saints, for all the Saints.

So “I will, with God's help”, becomes maybe more appropriately “We will, with God's help.” Because only the boldest of bold can wear their Halloween costume by themselves.

Today we behold the cloud of witnesses before us, in the past, present, and future, and we are able to bear witness again, and say “Oh Lord I want to be in that number.” **AMEN**

⁹ Revelation 7.4; [Sermon Brainwave 750: All Saints \(Year A\) - Nov. 1, 2020](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogwAazP4E7M) (Podcast) *Working Preacher*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogwAazP4E7M> (around minute 13).