

Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd
All Saints Sunday
November 4, 2018

A Foretaste Of The Feast To Come Revelation 21:1-6

Meal time was a very important time for us in our family. This was the time we gathered together. Between meals we had school to attend and work to do. We went our separate ways. But meal time was our time to be together. It was our time to catch up on what was happening in each other's lives. It was a treasured time and we tried to spend it together.

But from time to time one of us had to be gone. Sometimes I was gone for 3 days at a pastor's retreat or one of our sons was gone because of a sporting event or would be at a friend's home for a birthday party. Whenever one of us was not present for a meal, that person was missed. That person's chair was empty and there was no plate on that side of the table.

There were only four of us in our small family. But we were part of a larger family – God's family. This family, too, gathers around a meal. We will be celebrating this meal today. It's the Lord's Supper! And it is a very important time for us. It is a time for us to come together. Between meals we go our separate ways. But at meal time we gather as God's family. It is indeed a treasured time!

But Hugh Bumgardner won't be present at our meal today. You see, since last All Saints Day he has been taken to another part of the church – We call it the church triumphant. It is a part of the church we cannot see. But it is very real. And today we want to think about that part of the church.

Earlier in my ministry I exchanged pulpits with the Pastor at a church in Garfield, Kansas. The church had a white altar. Around this altar was a half-circle altar rail where the people of God would kneel to eat the Supper of the Lord. This rail, however had no break in it as ours does. The only way one could get to the altar was to leave the church nave, go through the sacristy, and then through a door, enter into the altar area.

How inconvenient, I thought. Why would anyone build a church that way? But then someone explained what it meant. You see, when the people built the church, they envisioned the altar as a table around which the people of God would gather to eat a family meal. They envisioned a full circle with the altar in the center. But of course, when people would come to church they would see only half of the circle, the half in front of the altar. The other half was hidden from their eyes.

This was meant to be a constant reminder of the church triumphant – that part of the church we cannot see with our eyes. The church is people – God's people – people whom God has rescued from sin and death through the saving action of Jesus Christ.

The church is people – but not just the people we can see. Those of us who are in the church today we call the “church militant.” The name reminds us that we are still fighting the good fight of faith. But the church also includes people who have gone before us, people who have lived and died and are now with God in heaven. We can no longer see these people, but they are still part of the church. They are the church triumphant, for God has given them victory over our greatest enemy – death.

The architecture of the Garfield Church was a reminder that the church, the family of God, is comprised not only of those people we can see, but also those whom we cannot see. They too are part of the family.

Today we remember these people. Of course it is impossible to remember all of them for their number is great. We cannot name each one, and we need not try. It is sufficient simply to thank God for them, for the apostles and evangelists, or the farmers and teachers and homemakers and pastors, for all who have followed Jesus Christ.

And yet today is not just a day of remembering all the nameless Christians who have gone before us. It is also a day of remembering those saints whom we have known personally. I mean those loved ones who shared life with us and who have now departed and are now resting in the presence of God. I invite you to think of them. Think of those whom you have loved dearly but are no longer here:

Perhaps your husband or wife, your mother or your father, an aunt or uncle, a friend, a grandparent, or even your child. Think of these people of God who are now at home with their Lord.

Such remembering may bring pain. The pain of personal loss. But today, on this festival of All Saints, we can have that pain soothed, not healed, mind you, but soothed, as we are reminded of the joy that is theirs. St. John writes of these people, God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared.

Do you have your loved one firmly fixed in your mind's eye? Can you see her as she used to busy herself in the kitchen? Do you remember how he loved to fish or hunt or camp or golf, or play ball? Can you still hear the sound of their voice? Do you recall the twinkle in their eye?

Let's thank God for our loved ones! I would like to pause for just a moment so that each of us can offer to God our prayers of praise and thanksgiving for blessing us with these special people. (Silence) I'm not done yet!!

Dear Lord, we thank you for our loved ones who were loved by you as well. They now enjoy the eternal life won by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Enable us also to live in faith all the days of our lives and when our days on this earth come to an end, bring us also to the fullness of joy you have promised to all your people. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

It is good for us to remember those who are in the church triumphant. It is good for us to be reminded that there is more to life than what meets the eye. You know, it is so easy for us to get caught up in the day to day affairs of our lives. We concentrate on finishing the paper that is due next week. We work on closing the business deal we have been pursuing for several months. We try to decide how to redecorate the dining room. How easy it is to forget that there is more to life than what is happening right now.

All Saints Day demands that we look beyond the present. It challenges us to step back and see the larger picture. God has a plan for us that is greater than this present moment and even greater than all the days we live on this earth. God's plan reaches into eternity. Jesus Christ went to the cross so that you and I might live with God forever.

All Saints Day also helps us to "hang in there" when the going gets tough. As a friend of mine wrote, "How do you give people encouragement when life and energy has been drained from them? How do you give them hope when shadows of gloom and despair are creeping across the land?" You give them another perspective!! With the eyes of a prophet you open the future and give them a glimpse of what God has in store for his people.

Today we are given such a glimpse! Through the prophet Isaiah 26:19 who declared, "Your dead shall live, their bodies shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy!" Through Jesus who promised that the faithful will inherit the kingdom of heaven. And through the Supper in which we are given the very body and blood of our crucified Savior as a pledge that these promises are indeed for us. Yes, today we are given a glimpse of what God has in store for his people.

But today is not just a day to remember the saints who have gone before us. We are also Saints because we too believe the promises of God. Today is also about us, about you and me and the unfinished work still left for us to do.

That's why today we again gather for our family meal. What a special time it is for us! For our Lord, clothed in mere bread and wine, graces our table with his presence, and gives us strength for today and power to be the Church of tomorrow.

May the remembrance of the Saints and the promises of the Gospel give hope and courage to you as you live out your days, awaiting that great feast which is to come. Amen.