



**For ALL the Saints
Revelation 7:9-17
November 1, 2020
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In Ireland and Scotland, there are certain places that locals call “thin places.” This does not mean that these places are called thin places because their altitude is so high that the air is thin. They are called thin places because it is believed that the distance between heaven and earth is very thin. People say they can actually perceive heaven itself in these places.

In our scripture passage today, John must be in a thin place because he perceives heaven. He has a vision where heaven opens up and he witnesses a grand worship service. Let’s read about it. Before we do, let us pray.

Prayer: Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by your word into women and men of faith. Amen.

Read Revelation 7:9-17
The Word of the Lord.....

I think heaven is going to surprise us.
We are going to be surprised by who is there.

Do you remember the movie “Monty Python’s Life of Brian”? A boy is born around the same time as Jesus. His name is Brian. Some years later, Brian and his mother hear Jesus preach the Sermon on the Mount. Some people are listening intently. Others are speaking with their neighbor. Others are looking away in other directions, paying no attention. You know, a typical church service.

The camera pans to Brian and his mother. They are having difficulty hearing Jesus along with others.

Listen to what they hear:

“Blessed are the cheesemakers.”

“What’s so special about cheesemakers?” a woman asks.

“It’s not meant to be taken literally,” a man replies. “I think it refers to any manufacturers of dairy products.”

“Blessed are the Greek,” one hears.

“The Greek?” one wonders.

“Apparently they are going to inherit the earth.”

And it goes on.....

In the Bible, saints are ordinary people who know God. So when Monty Python says, “Blessed are the cheesemakers,” they are right. The cheesemakers will be in heaven...along with the Greeks...as saints.

According to our scripture passage, heaven will be people from every nation, every tribe, every language. There will be people we consider unforgiveable and unredeemable. There will be people that we have long held grudges and prejudices. There will be people from nations we have called enemy. There will be people that we fail to see in this life because of their poverty, disease, or station in life.

They are all called saints.

They are not necessarily the best and brightest, the most sophisticated or the most successful, but they are ones who have, as the passage says, “come out of the great tribulation.” These people have come out of the tribulation of life in all its temptations, distractions, interruptions, in all of life’s losses, problems, conflicts, pain and pandemics.

They are all called saints.

These people have been bloodied by life, but washed clean by the blood of the Lamb. To signify this washing, they are wearing white robes. Robes are an important piece of clothing in the Bible. It is not only a piece of outward clothing, but signify who the person is, what her or his status is.

As these people stand before the throne in their white robes, it signifies their status before God, not based on anything they have done but because of the transformative power of Christ at work in their lives. They stand pure in white before God.

These are the saints of God in all their variety of languages, culture, nations. They are the names of the people we read earlier in this service. One day, they will be you and me.

I think heaven will surprise us not only by who is going to be there, but heaven will surprise us by what people will do there.

When heaven is depicted in romantic art, what we often see are a group of cherubs playing their harps, while people lounge around on clouds of ease, as if on a permanent vacation.

Our glimpse of heaven in our scripture passage today contradicts that scenario. The glimpse of heaven John saw shows a heaven that is a very active place. Our passage says the saints serve God day and night.

When I conduct memorials, the family talks about things that person loved to do, such as play a musical instrument, or sing, or teach, or cooking, or do carpentry. And almost always the family says that person is doing the same thing in heaven.

When people ask, "What will we do in heaven?" one possible answer is to simply ask: "What do you love to do now that will go on in the world to come?" What is it that when you do it, you lose track of time because you get lost in it? What do you do that makes you think, 'I could do this forever'? What is it that makes you think, "I was made for this?" (Rob Bell)

So what is it people are busy doing in heaven? They are worshiping and serving God and others--doing those very same things that gave them the greatest joy, the greatest meaning, in their life here on earth.

Here is another description of the age to come: "And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, *and they will reign forever and ever*" (Rev. 22:4-5 italics added). It doesn't say Christ will reign forever and forever. It says we will be working with Christ "forever and ever."

Now, "forever and ever" is a long time. Don't you think a little training is in order for such reigning or working with Christ? I believe our time here on earth gets us ready for our time in heaven.

These are the saints of God, ruling with Christ. They are the names read earlier in this service. One day, they will be you and me.

So, heaven will surprise us by who will be there. Heaven will surprise us by what we will do there. And heaven will surprise us because of the scope of healing in heaven.

Do you remember the "no more tears" commercial by Johnson's Baby Shampoo? A toddler is in the bathtub with shampoo in its hair and the baby is laughing, but the shampoo doesn't cause tear. Don't we wish that the shampoo company's promise could be universal: no more tears, not just in the bathtub, but always and everywhere in the world!

According to our passage today, that day will come.

Again, I hear at memorials how the person is no longer suffering. It brings great comfort to loved ones. Our passage says there will be no more suffering and tears.

Heaven is a place where all the injustices of this world will finally be made right. People who have known hunger and pain and suffering and fear and death will not experience these again. God has wiped every tear from every eye and those

former things are over and done with, once and for all. That is the promise in this passage.

All those names we read...our saints....they are experiencing this healing in heaven. And someday we will, too.

Meanwhile, we live on this side of eternity. When we worship together on earth, we catch a glimpse of heaven, of that worship service we will be part of someday. When we continue to do what we love on earth in serving others, it prepares us for what we will do in heaven. As we work for healing on this earth, as we fight pandemics and cancer and hunger and poverty and injustice, one day we will experience healing in all its completeness in heaven.

All those names we read...our saints....are worshipping in heaven, doing what they love to do, and experiencing complete healing as they stand before the throne of the Lamb who is their shepherd. And someday we will, too.

And all God's saints said, "Amen!"