

Sunday - November 1, 2009  
Pastor - Rev. Paula P. Werner  
Sermon - **Today is a Day for Remembering**

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be formed by your grace, for you are our Lord, our Rock, and our redeemer. Amen."*

We have three points to consider this morning: First of all, we need to consider what the scripture just read from the book of Revelation says to us in 2009. Secondly, we need to remember saints in our lives, and thirdly, we are remembering Jesus' life and death through celebrating holy communion this first Sunday of the month. These three points will form our thinking this morning.

So, what DOES this passage from the book of Revelation mean? Revelation is the last book in the New Testament. It is probably the book with the widest number of interpretations. Various people heatedly disagree on its meaning. So I encourage you to read it sometime – preferably in a class because it uses symbols that we don't understand today. Our own Bible Basics class has been taking an overview look at Revelation for several weeks. We know that it was written by a man named John based on a vision he had. John was living in exile on the island of Patmos located in the Aegean Sea. The times in which John described this vision are important.... It was 95 AD, that means it was about 62 years after Jesus' death and ascension into heaven. The early church was growing and was considered a threat to the expected order of Judaism and the Roman Empire. The early church was not a military or power threat to Rome, but because Christians would not worship Caesar or Nero or Domitian or any of the Roman Emperors, they were considered threats. Therefore, there was persecution of the church – awful persecution. People who believed in Jesus Christ as Lord and worshipped him as Lord and King instead of a Roman Emperor were in great danger of torture, persecution and death. These awful happenings were enough to cause hesitation in some people about joining the church or proclaiming the faith. The churches needed encouragement in their personal and institutional battle. This writing from John functioned to encourage churches and members. The vision John receives, shows him that although there is great evil, danger and death, God through Christ triumphs. God has the last say, is the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end.

Our reading this morning describes a part of the vision that tells us "there was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne." God is on the throne. In ancient times, a throne was actually a ceremonial chair from which a ruler issued judgments. This ceremonial chair was so closely associated with royalty that it became symbolic of kingship. In the Hebrew tradition, Yahweh/Jehovah/Adonai was deemed the supreme monarch and the Messiah was vice-regent. This is John's vision of what it will be at the very end of time – we have a visual of heaven, thanks to his descriptions. We have some certain promises that we can deduce: The promise that God is in control; The promise

that God rules; God judges. God redeems through Jesus Christ who is called the Lamb. The Lamb is seen standing beside the heavenly throne. We have a Christ-centered image of Heaven and with multitudes of people gathered before the throne, this presumes that the redeemed will be ushered into God's presence. It is the sacrifice – of Jesus' own life that redeems—restores, atones us. In Jewish belief, an actual lamb was sacrificed to atone or redeem – to pay for the sins of the people. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God, sent to redeem your sin and mine. This image – this vision in Revelation—of the Lamb there with God in the final times affirms to us that Christ has overcome death and sits at the right hand of God Almighty to judge us. The picture we are given in Revelation is of everyone and everything praising God. We are told that this is a time and place where there is no hunger or thirst, or heat, or pain anymore. This is a time and place where there is no more sadness – no tears. In John's vision, all who are there worship God.

As we think about the people who have given their lives faithfully, and are now gone from us, it is comforting to be given reassurance that this life is not all there is. John's vision and Jesus' words comfort us in knowing that those we love, those who have lived their lives in service to God and others, are with God. The persecuted martyrs from the early years of Christianity, the Christian historical figures down through history who kept the faith alive, these persons are saints --- they are with God, a cloud of witnesses to faith. So, too, with God, are our loved ones –saints-- whose names are not in the history books or are well known to others. Yet, their pictures are in our mind's eyes, their actions and words have made a real difference in our lives and in the lives of others. These saints known perhaps only to us have awakened in us an awareness of God, have lived a life which beckoned us to a more Godly way, have been encouragers in the faith. They are in that huge multitude gathered around the throne of God – praising and thanking God. We remember them well. Let me make this point through this exercise: I'm going to ask some questions about people and I'd like you to make a mental answer to my questions:

Can you name the three wealthiest people in the world?

Can you name the last three winners of the Miss America contest?

How about 5 people who have won the Nobel or Pulitzer Prize?

What about the last 3 Academy Award winners for Best Actor & Actress?

Can you name the last decade's worth of World Series winners?

How did you do? If you are like most people, you can only fill in a few names here and there, but usually can't remember who did what and who won what. The point is most of us don't remember the headliners of yesterday. These are no second-rate achievers. They're the best in their fields. But the applause dies. Awards tarnish. Achievements are forgotten. Accolades and certificates are buried with their owners.

Now, here's another quiz. See how you do on this one: Can you name 3 teachers who aided your journey through school. Can you name five people who have taught you something worthwhile. Can you think of five people you enjoy spending time with. Was this easier? Of course. We have no problem remembering **the people who have helped to shape us. We remember those**

**who have inspired us and encouraged us.** These are the people we tell our friends about. These are the people that hold a place in our heart. These are the people we truly value. The lesson? The people who make a difference in your life aren't the ones with the most credentials, the most money, or the most awards. They're the ones who care, who have shown love to you.

So on this All Saints' Day, who has revealed the love of God to you?

Who do you remember?

Who showed you a bit of what God is like?

Who sought to love their neighbors, and to love God?

This is the day set aside in worship service to remember those whose lives shined a light for you and me to follow. We are better people, we love more, because of the way these everyday saints exemplified Godly living. Just as we have been touched by the example of others –saints – so too you and I have a responsibility to be witnesses to the faith. So today is a day for remembering the great cloud of witnesses, it is a day for remembering the known only to us saints of our lives, and today is a day for remembering that we, too, share in the responsibility of being a witness to faith. We will most likely not be called to be a martyr --- thankfully. It is hardly likely that any of us will be persecuted for our beliefs --- we have it so very easy to be a Christian in this culture. Our major battle is with ourselves – following our own desires or God's way for us – with prioritizing God first in our lives. How we lead our lives is important – to us and for the message we are sending about our faith. A well known quote says, "Of one hundred persons, **one** will read the Bible, the other 99 will read the Christian." One out of 100 will read the written word of God, but 99 will observe your life. Today is a Day for Remembering our responsibility as those who are baptized – who have agreed to live out the promises made at our baptism. We have a responsibility to live as saints in the faith.

Lastly, today is a day for remembering the gift of Jesus Christ.

Remembering that he did not take the easy way; he loved God and served others always, and gave his all --- his very life as a sacrifice for you and me. Today – communion Sunday – is our special sacrament day to remember through re-enacting the event that Jesus himself initiated. As you and I receive the broken bread and drink the poured cup, we remember who Jesus is, what he did, what it means for us. Receiving communion is also a way of remembering who we are. We are disciples – believers and those who follow the Way that Jesus taught and lived. That's what the little piece of bread dipped in juice communicates.

You and I have a legacy, an inheritance, a heritage – paid for in lives lived. The people represented by these candles on this altar, and in past altars and candles and in that great cloud of witnesses seen only in our mind's eye, -- those saints kept the flame of their faith. We can do no less that to let our light so shine that people may see our good works and our faith and give thanks and glory to God the Father of all.

So be it.