

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin R. Eden

All Saint's Sunday
The Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost
Saturday, October 22, 2011 at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, October 23, 2011 at 8:30 a.m. & 10:15 a.m.

All the Saints

I John 3:1-3

Today we celebrate the Feast of All Saints. All Saints' Day, of course, was actually on November 1. For me, what an appropriate celebration to have after returning from the Holy Land. In John's Revelation, we hear the names of the sons of Israel: Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher. . . 12,000 from each tribe. The fullness of the people of God. The fullness of the saints – both Old and New Testament – that is what we celebrate today.

Being in Israel, I don't want to say it was overwhelming, but it was very powerful to know that the original sons of Israel were there: Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher . . .; but also the following generations including Joshua, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Peter, James, John, and Jesus Himself lived there ; walked there; proclaimed salvation for all the saints there.

I tried writing a sermon before I left – attempting to anticipate what it was going to be like to walk in those footsteps. It is like telling a first-time expectant father how much he will love and care

for his child after he or she is born. There was no way to properly prepare or truly appreciate being there without being there.

Seeing those places where Abraham, Joshua, and David had been – it is easy to think of those saints of old and their lives as just a bunch of old stones. We walked where the saints of old lived and interacted with God and one another.

But as we celebrate All Saints' Day, whether you have stood in the Holy Land or not, it is not archaeological evidence, but it is the Word of God that confirms and verifies that the “saints” are not just a bunch of old dead guys we hear about in the Bible. The “saints” are the people of God of every generation who lived and interacted with God. This includes you.

You are a baptized “saint”. You have heard God speak His Word through the prophets and evangelists. You have participated in the broken body and shed blood of Christ Himself. You are just as forgiven, you are just as saved as those who stepped into the empty tomb on Easter morning. You have been freed from the burden of sin here in this life of great tribulation.

As we do each All Saints' Day, we remember the saints from Our Redeemer who were called out of the church on earth and into the church triumphant this past year. They are the church. You are the church.

In Israel, we had a wonderful guide named Johnny who repeatedly reminded us that if we came to take pictures of rocks, the tour only needs to last one day. There are rocks and old buildings everywhere. At each place we visited, Johnny told the story of the saints of old and how God interacted with them – how God rescued them from their great tribulation.

We were privileged to hear the Word of God every day. We heard the stories of the saints as they pertained to each place we visited. We stood in the place where Paul stood before Herod Agrippa in Caesarea. I skipped a rock on the Sea of Galilee where Jesus cooked the fish and met with His disciples after the resurrection.

We took a boat across the Sea of Galilee. I stood in the Garden of Gethsemane. I touched the Jordan River. I touched the Western Wall of the Temple mount. We stood on the Temple mount. These same stones were there when Christ was in Jerusalem.

But if the saints are not there to proclaim God's Word and the saving work of Christ, then they are just stones. And they all could be torn down, buried, or skipped into the Sea of Galilee and it would not matter. God is not concerned with preserving stones. That is not how His Church is built. Even the beautiful stones

here at Our Redeemer are not what makes this a suitable place to be called a church.

You are the church. The church is where God's saints gather around God's Word and participate in His Sacraments.

We saw some beautiful old stone structures in Israel. They became alive and recognized as churches when Johnny spoke the Word the God and told the stories of the saints. Or, like in Bethlehem or at the Garden of Gethsemane, when we got to attend the last part of a worship service. Or like in Nazareth and on the Mount of Olives when we were able to sing hymns in those acoustically perfect domes.

Without the Word of God, without the saints present and willing to proclaim the salvation which Christ brings, those beautiful buildings would just be piles of stone and wood. This beautiful building would just be a pile of stone and wood.

The difference is that God's churches are filled with His saints who proclaim the Word of God, participate in His sacraments, sing praises to Him, and rejoice that Christ has taken away the burden of sin in this life of great tribulation, and He has promised us a place with the saints of old in the Church Triumphant.

I said before that attempting to anticipate what it was going to be like to walk in the footsteps of the saints who lived in Israel

is like telling a first-time expectant father how much he will love and care for his child after he or she is born. As we ponder the saints on earth and the saints above and our place within the Kingdom of God, we are reminded that we have a Father who loves and cares for us.

Until I was a father, I didn't understand the lengths I would go to in order to protect and preserve those who I love. As we hear the stories of the saints, we see how far our Father will go to preserve and rescue His children. Even if it meant sending His own Son to the cross, for the sake of you, His dear child, it was a price He was willing to pay.

Christ died. And for you to have life, He rolled away the stone. Amen.