

“We Are Saints”

Rev. 7:1-17

Today, we celebrate All Saints’ Day. This is a major festival in the life of the church. There is Easter, then Christmas; then there is an argument whether All Saints’ Day or Pentecost is the next most important. This day, we turn our attention to the saints. Who are these 144,000 that have been sealed? We see listed in John’s Revelation 12,000 from each of the tribes of the sons of Israel. At first glance, you might say, “there are the Old Testament Jews, but what about us?” We are included.

Here on the wall is a painting by Ruth Ann Snowden. I asked her if I could borrow it as a visual aid. Her inspiration for this painting was this text from Revelation. When you see the painting, you see all the earth with the four angels at the four corners of the earth, and then there is another angel coming with the seal of the living God.

The four angels are holding back the destructive forces that will bring an end to this world. Our nation caught a little glimpse of the power of God over His creation this week. While watching the news footage, I thought of Jesus’ words of warning to His disciples concerning the days of the “abomination of desolation” that will precede the Day of Judgment. He said, “Let the one who is on his rooftop not go down to take what is in his house, and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his

cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in winter” [Mt. 24:17-20].

He goes on to say that there will be a great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now. What we saw this week is only a taste of what is to come in the end. That is a scary thought.

The good news is that His angels continue to protect us. And they will continue to protect us throughout the great tribulation until that final day. And the ultimate protection you have is that you are part of the 144,000. You have been sealed.

Now you may ask, “How can the descendants of Germanic barbarians be counted among the tribes of the sons of Israel?” That is a good question. I find it very interesting that in the list, Judah is first and Benjamin is last, with the rest in between. Judah and Benjamin were the only tribes to survive.

The 10 northern tribes rebelled against God, were conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC, they were carried into exile, and they blended into the greater population. They were lost to history, but not to God.

God remembered them and remembered His promise to Abraham. 200 years after the 10 tribes were carried off, through the prophet Zechariah, God said, “I will save the house of Joseph. I will bring them back because I have compassion on them, and they shall be as though I had not rejected them. . . Though I scattered them among the nations, yet

in far countries they shall remember me, and with their children they shall live and return” [Zech. 10:6,9].

We are the saints who are sealed. We are the 144,000. The descendants of Germanic barbarians are a part of this symbolic number of saints – this symbolic number that represents completeness within the Kingdom of God on earth and in heaven. You and I are the fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy.

God’s children were scattered among the nations in judgment. We were scattered to the four corners of the earth. According to God’s grace, He has gathered us in and has put His seal on us all.

In Baptism, what does the pastor say, “Receive the sign of the holy cross; both upon the forehead and upon the heart to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified.” The mark, the seal placed upon you is the cross of Christ. You are marked with the cross.

In Baptism, you received that white robe of righteousness. How is that robe made white? In the blood of the Lamb. The Lamb of God was sacrificed on the altar of the cross so that God our Father could keep His promise to Abraham, so that He would fulfill the prophecy spoken by Zechariah. The Lamb of God shed His blood on the altar of the cross for you, so that you could be gathered in from the four corners of the earth and sealed in Baptism.

John sees a great multitude from every nation standing before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, waving palm branches. The number of the

redeemed is not limited to 144,000. That number represents the fullness of the “multitude that no one could number.”

All Saints’ Day is not just a day to remember those who have died in the faith, although we honor their memory today. Even more, we honor and celebrate the work of Christ on the cross. We rejoice in the saints in heaven and on earth being washed clean in the blood of the Lamb.

All Saints’ Day is a great day in the life of the Church. We gather with the saints on earth and we remember the saints who have gone before us. We celebrate that it is God who has gathered us as His lost and scattered people. He has brought us to “springs of living water.” Whether in heaven or on earth, the saints gather and we participate in the blood of the Lamb. In that blood, we have been washed. With that blood, we have been strengthened. He has sealed us as His own; He will wipe away every tear from your eyes. Amen.