

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

All Saints' Day & Pentecost 23
Saturday, November 4, 2023, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, November 5, 2023, at 9:00 a.m.

“Wood and Stone”

Revelation 7:2-17

Today we celebrate the Feast of All Saints. All Saints' Day, of course, was actually on November 1. For about a month now, what is going on in the Holy Land seems to dominate the news and is in the forefront of our thoughts. 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.

These past weeks, I have been thinking a lot about our trip to Israel in 2011 and how our planned trip in 2025 is definitely on hold. It was very powerful to know that the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were there. 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.

If you have never been there, attempting to anticipate what it is 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 stories of people who walked on those 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 saw the stone rolled away and stepped into the empty tomb on Easter morning. You have been freed from the burden of sin even as you continue to live in the midst of 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 were in the Holy Land. 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. 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 wood and stone. Without the Word of God proclaimed by saints, this beautiful building would just be a pile of wood and stone.

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 is 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 be nailed to the wood of the cross, for the sake of you, His dear child, it was a price He was willing to pay.

Christ died nailed to a piece of wood. And for you to have life, He rolled away the stone. Amen.