

November 2, 2014  
All Saints Day  
*A Great Multitude*  
Revelation 7:9-17

**Opening words:** Yesterday, November 1 was All Saints Day. It is a holiday that can be traced back to May 13, 609. For it was on that day that Pope Boniface IV created the holiday to remember all the martyrs of the church. The rest is history. Within the tradition of the United Methodist Church, saints are defined as anyone who believes, both the living and the dead. It is observed annually on the first Sunday of November. This is the first Sunday of November, and today we will remember four church members who have passed between November 1, 2013 and October 31, 2014. Over that twelve month period, Western Reserve has welcomed forty-three new members.

Today, we are instructed from the last book in the Bible, Revelation. There is something about this literary work that grabs our attention. The reason is simple. Everyone wants to know about the end of time. However, a little background will be helpful. It was written by the Apostle John. He was the only one of the apostles to die of natural causes; the rest were martyred. The year he wrote it was approximately 95 AD, so he is old. Yet, he is also spiritually mature. The Roman authorities did not know exactly what to do with him. His death would only fuel the growth of the church, so they exiled him to a Roman penal colony on the island of Patmos. It is while he is on that island that he has a series of visions. Those visions were recorded and became the book of Revelation. Our scripture lesson for today comes from the seventh chapter of Revelation, verses nine through seventeen. It paints our clearest picture of heaven. Let me call this message *A Great Multitude*.

**Revelation 7:9-17** <sup>9</sup> After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. <sup>10</sup> And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

<sup>11</sup> All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, <sup>12</sup> saying:

"Amen!

Praise and glory  
and wisdom and thanks and honor  
and power and strength  
be to our God for ever and ever.  
Amen!"

<sup>13</sup> Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?"

<sup>14</sup> I answered, "Sir, you know."

And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. <sup>15</sup> Therefore,

"they are before the throne of God

and serve him day and night in his temple;

and he who sits on the throne

will shelter them with his presence.

<sup>16</sup> 'Never again will they hunger;

never again will they thirst.

The sun will not beat down on them,'

nor any scorching heat.

<sup>17</sup> For the Lamb at the center of the throne

will be their shepherd;

'he will lead them to springs of living water.'

'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'"

I love this story. An anonymous writer tells us about an American tourist's visit to the 19th century Polish rabbi, Chofetz Chaim. He was astonished to see that the rabbi's home was only a simple room. In that room were a table and bench, along with a variety of books. Perplexed, the tourist asked, "Rabbi, where are all your possessions? "Where are yours?" replied the rabbi. "Mine?" asked the puzzled American. "But I'm a visitor here. I'm only passing through." "So am I," replied the rabbi. Never forget, we are only visitors in this earth. Someday, we are all going to die and go home. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" Let us look at this morning's scripture lesson together.

Today, we find ourselves in the seventh chapter of Revelation. There is nothing easy about these words. They are filled with Old Testament symbolism. John did his best to describe what he experienced in the vision, but the English language is unable to hold the full meaning of the experience. The best we can do is use our sanctified imagination. To fully understand the vision, you must go back to the beginning of the vision in chapter four. It all begins with John standing in front of an opened door. He is invited in to experience the glory of God. According to the text, God is seated on a throne surrounded by various beings. Some of them we understand, like angels. Some of the beings we don't understand. In chapter seven, we are told that 144,000 people are surrounding the throne. They are the various representatives of the tribes of Israel. Surrounding the 144,000 is a greater group. Their number is so large that they can't be counted. They come from every nation in the world and speak every tongue. Yet, in spite of their differences, they have one thing in common. Each one is wearing a white robe. It is white because it has been washed in the blood of the lamb, Jesus. That fact should not be surprising. As I have told you in the past, Jesus is our only hope of salvation. The scriptures do not say it, but it must be true. Every day, the great multitude grows larger because each day people leave this world.

This year we added four more people to the multitude, Bud, Jack, Fran and Anna. Someday, you and I are going to be in that multitude. I hope being in a crowd doesn't bother you!

Thursday night I stayed up late working on this message. I kept thinking about the great multitude. At first I found it to be emotional. I know people who are in that great multitude now. My parents, Ron and Ruth Adams, are in that great multitude. My grandparents, Roger and Orbie Adams, are in that great multitude. My good friend, David Glen, is in that great multitude. People from this church, who I really enjoyed, Ron Schoch, Rocky Russo, Joe Hammerton, "Mac" Macaulay, are in that great multitude. How many people do you know are in the great multitude? As I thought about the people I know, I began to grieve. Then it all changed. In many ways those people are still with us. Their memories are altering the way I live and perceive today. The pagans believe that as long as their memory remains in this world, they remain in this world. Today, I want to talk about their influence.

### **They Comfort Us**

Several years ago, I watched a documentary on Russian prisons. They interviewed a Russian prisoner, who had been sentenced for selling drugs. They walked through a normal day with him. We saw the food he ate. We saw his bed. We saw his normal routine. Every day was identical. However, that day was different. It was visitor's day. They only had visitors once every two months. He was excited because his father was coming to visit him. Through an English translator, he said the worst thing about being in a Russian prison was the loneliness. He didn't trust any of the other prisoners, so he didn't have any friends. He was alone and afraid. He said, "If I had one friend in here my experience would be completely different." How would your life change if you had to live in complete isolation? The fear of loneliness is alive and well in our world.

That is why the great multitude is so important. They remind us that we are never alone. When we get to heaven, the people we have loved in this world will be waiting for us. The faith was never meant to be lived out in isolation. It was meant to be lived out in community. The church is filled with people who are running the race with you. In the perfect church we are all striving to be a little more like Jesus every day. On All Saints Day, we are reminded of the saints who have completed the race. The very presence of both the living and the saints comforts us as we run the race of life. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

### **They Remind Us**

Second, the great multitude reminds us of what is really important. What are the most important things in your life? Who are the most important people in your life? How important is your church? How important is your relationship with Jesus Christ? You will be able to answer that question in a few weeks when you fill out your estimate of giving card toward next year's budget.

You may remember this story from the past. It was Super Bowl Sunday and the stadium was packed except for one seat. Surprised to see an empty seat, a diehard fan remarked about it to a woman sitting next to it. "It was my husband's," the woman explained, "But he died." "I'm very sorry," said the man. "Yet I'm really surprised that another relative, or friend, didn't jump at the chance to take the seat reserved for him." "Beats me," she said. "They all insisted on going to his funeral." It is a question of priority.

What are the most important things in your life? Who are the most important people in your life? How important is your church? How important is your relationship with Jesus Christ? I have said it a million times. The only things that really matter are those things that will matter in one hundred years. What matters in one hundred years? The answer is Jesus! The great multitude reminds us of what is really important. They are wearing white robes because of Jesus. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

### **They Challenge Us**

Third and finally, the great multitude challenges us to finish the race of life. Let me ask you two questions. First, do you know any church drop-outs? They believe they can forge a relationship with Jesus on their own. Good luck! Once again, the faith was designed to be lived out in community. The second question is harder. Do you know of anyone who has resigned from the faith? Where does one go from church? Where does one go who has walked away from the faith? You know the answer. They go nowhere. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

In 1968, the Olympics were held in Mexico City. One of the featured events in any Olympics is the marathon. The winner of that year's marathon was an Ethiopian, Mamo Waldi. The crowd cheered as he crossed the finish line. An hour later, the last marathon runner crossed the finish line. He wore the colors of his nation, Tanzania. His name was John Steven Aquari. He limped to the finish line and was assisted to a first aid station. His leg was bleeding and bandaged. He had taken a bad fall early in the race. Now, it was all he could do to limp his way around the track. The crowd stood and applauded as he completed that last lap. When he finally crossed the finish line, one man dared ask the question all were wondering. "You are badly injured. Why didn't you quit? Why didn't you give up?" Aquari, with quiet dignity said, "My country did not send me seven thousand miles to start this race. My country sent me to finish."

It isn't just true of marathon runners; it is true of us! Has anyone here ever fallen down in the marathon of life? How many times have you fallen? Perhaps, you fell when your marriage failed? Perhaps, you fell when you lost your job? Perhaps, you fell when your medical tests revealed the unthinkable? Perhaps, you fell when your children messed up or your parents gave up? Perhaps, you fell when a loved one died? Do I have to go on? When was the last time you fell? At that moment in your life, did you get up or did you stay down? The great multitude won't let you quit. They are saying, "Get up!"

It is not how you start the race that matters. The only things that matters is how you finish! And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**