

November 1, 2015  
All Saints Day  
*The Decision to Persevere*  
John 7:37-44

**Opening words:** According to some, the average person makes more than 35,000 decisions in a single day. Most of them are rather simple: where to sit, what to eat for breakfast, what lane to drive in, should I have another cup of coffee, etc. These decisions are easily made and have very few consequences. Other decisions are more serious, with long-lasting effects. Some decisions have an eternal influence. It is those decisions that we are looking at in this sermon series, *Six Decisions*. Today's message, number five in this six-part series, is called *The Decision to Persevere*.

We are instructed this morning from the seventh chapter of John, verses 37 thru 44. It is impossible to fully understand the meaning without looking at the context. This is the truth. The seventh and eighth chapters of John must be studied at as a single piece. The background of these chapters is the Festival of the Tabernacles. It was a time when the Jews remembered how God cared for their ancestors in the wilderness and it was a time to remember how God had cared for their generation. It was an extremely popular holiday and everyone wanted to attend. In John 7:3, Jesus's brothers encouraged Jesus to attend. These were not his spiritual brothers, they were his biological brothers. The truth be told, they did not believe him and wanted to do him harm. The Master was unpopular in Judea. In spite of this, Jesus attended and caused division in the crowd. Our scripture reading for today is John 7:37-44.

**John 7:37-44** <sup>37</sup> On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. <sup>38</sup> Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>39</sup> By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified. <sup>40</sup> On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet." <sup>41</sup> Others said, "He is the Messiah." Still others asked, "How can the Messiah come from Galilee? <sup>42</sup> Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David's descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" <sup>43</sup> Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. <sup>44</sup> Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.

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Today, November 1, is All Saints Day. It is a holiday that is directly linked with the highest day on the satanic calendar, Halloween. It was created by Pope Boniface IV, who was concerned about the popularity of Halloween. He created All Saints Day for two reasons. He wanted the church martyrs to be remembered and he wanted to overshadow the dark day of Halloween. The first All Saints Day was May 13, 609. It is safe to say both holidays have evolved. In our time and tradition, we have redefined the word *saint*. Within the tradition of the United Methodist Church, we understand a saint to be anyone who believes in Jesus, both the living and the dead. That makes you a saint. How saintly do you feel? Liturgically speaking, All Saints Day is the first Sunday

in November, which is today. It is a time to remember our fellow church members who have died during this calendar year. Between November 1, 2014 and October 31, 2015, we have welcomed eighteen new church members. Sadly, we have lost twelve to death. If there is someone you miss today, say, **"Amen!"**

We find ourselves in the seventh chapter of John. In order for you to understand the text, you must remember that Jesus was extremely popular in Galilee, but extremely unpopular in Judea. For that reason the Master stayed in Galilee, where he performed many miracles. In the seventh chapter of John, things began to change. The time had come for the Festival of the Tabernacles. Jesus's biological brothers, Joseph and Mary's offspring, encouraged Jesus, their older half-brother, to go. I don't know why, maybe they were jealous of him, but they did not believe in Jesus. They told him to go because it would be good for his career. His miracles would draw a larger following. It pains me to say the next line. They really encouraged Jesus to go to cause him harm.

Their sinister plan worked well. Jesus went to the Festival of the Tabernacles. He performed miracles and taught the crowds about the Kingdom of God. Just as Jesus's brothers had hoped, the crowd became divided. Our scripture reading for today tells us just how fractured the crowd grew. Some believed in Jesus, others did not. Still others had questions about Jesus. The text is clear, Jesus was controversial! We shouldn't be surprised, because Jesus still is controversial. If you don't believe me, then just ask the people in your life. Jesus has a way of polarizing any crowd.

**How many people do you know who get mad when you mention the name Jesus?** I'll bet you know someone. The reason they get mad is the same reason that people got mad in Jesus's time. They simply can't accept the truth. Jesus is the son of God and our only hope of salvation. Those words are painful to our politically correct world. Our world wants Jesus to be just another religious figure. Our world wants Jesus to stand equal with Mohammed and Buddha. This is the truth the world doesn't want to hear. Jesus isn't equal; Jesus is superior. Jesus is our only hope of salvation. How many people do you know who get mad when you mention the name Jesus? I'll bet you know someone. If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

**How many people do you know who have walked away from Jesus?** I'll bet you know someone. Perhaps this is a better question: How many church drop-outs do you know? I will be the first to admit it. The church is not a perfect place; the church can be self-destructive. However, the church is still the best place to learn about Jesus. If you stop going to church then you stop learning about Jesus. If you stop going to church then your theology is formed by your personal opinions. How many church drop-outs do you know? How many do you know who have walked away from Jesus? I'll bet you know someone. How many people do you know who have replaced Jesus with volunteerism or community service? It is impossible to earn your salvation. If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

**How many people do you know who truly believe in Jesus?** I hope you know someone. That number seems to be getting smaller all the time. By your presence here today, in the face of a divided crowd, I am assuming you believe in Jesus. If that is true, say, "**Amen!**" It really comes down to a simple choice. Are you going to persevere in the faith?

When was the last time you gave your testimony? Everyone's story is different. Some came to know him by the gentle leading of a loving parent. Some came to know Jesus at church camp. Some came to know Jesus at a powerful altar call. Sometimes the conversion was like wading into a deep pool. Sometimes the conversion was like jumping off the high dive. Let me say two things. First, it really doesn't matter how you came to know Jesus, it only matters that you came to know Jesus. Heaven wouldn't be the same without you. Second, it really doesn't matter how you came to know Jesus, but it does matter that you leave this world believing Jesus. It doesn't matter how you came to the faith, but it does matter that you remain in the faith.

Today, we remember twelve of our own who left this world believing in Jesus. Their work in this world is done and they are now part of the great crowd of witnesses who surround us at this very moment (Hebrews 12). How many people do you know in that crowd? How many of these twelve do you remember?

Carol Bassett  
Dorothy Hill  
Larry Himes  
Annabelle Lerch  
Alma Macaulay  
Phil Martin  
Claudia "Penny" Nicosia  
Midge Payne  
Margaret Ricker  
Ted Shirilla  
Doris Stark  
Louise Waddell

Let me end with 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. Soon I will be going home." "So am I," replied the rabbi. "Soon I will be going home as well." Never forget, we are only visitors on this earth. Someday, we are all going to go home. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

Will you pray with me?