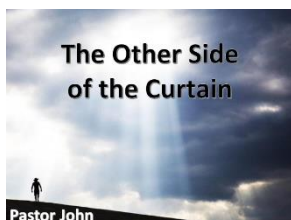


## **"The Other Side of the Curtain"**

November 5, 2017

### Revelation 7: 9-17

*<sup>9</sup> After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. <sup>10</sup> They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" <sup>11</sup> And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, <sup>12</sup> singing, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." <sup>13</sup> Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" <sup>14</sup> I said to him, "Sir, you are the one that knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. <sup>15</sup> For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. <sup>16</sup> They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; <sup>17</sup> for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."*



Today we begin our series "The Good News about Death" by looking at the other side of the curtain – life eternal. Today is

All Saints' Sunday, a day when we remember and rejoice in those who have come before us. As we began our worship today, we shared in a unison prayer remembering those who have gone before. Those saints who have lived and died bear witness for us. In them and in their lives, we can see what it looks like to live a faithful and righteous life. In our scripture passage for today, it ties in very well with All Saints' Sunday as we see the end game for those we know and love and who have gone on. Once again, we give thanks to God for all of the saints who now rest in the eternal presence of Jesus Christ. Let us pray.

Today our scripture comes from the Book of Revelation. In our Tuesday noon Bible study, we have been slowly working our way through Revelation since the beginning of September. We are almost through chapter two. The



Revelation of John is not an easy book to read or to understand. It is not a book of the Bible that yields a lot of coffee-mug quote material. Revelation is a book that does have plagues and trumpet blasts, the four horsemen of the apocalypse, the years and years of tribulation... Yet Revelation is ultimately a book of hope. It is a book whose primary intent was to comfort the saints on this side of the second coming of Jesus. It is a book that gives a word of hope to those who are struggling, to those who feel as if their world has come apart. It is a promise to those who feel that they are already at their end. It is a promise that a new beginning does await. Revelation is a book of hope.

In our passage today, John is describing a beautiful scene. John begins by

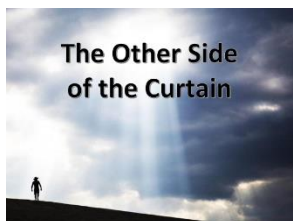


describing a "*multitude that no one could count*". There is a countless sea of faithful people standing before the Lamb, Jesus Christ. Within this sea of people is great diversity. We read that the group is from every nation and tribe and that all

the languages of the earth are spoken in this multitude. These people have lived through the great tribulation and now stand before the throne, lifting their voices in joyous song, singing, "*Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb*"! They are experiencing that salvation as they sing. Each person is clothed in a white robe and they wave palm branches in their hands. It is a scene of elation and happiness. The white robe is symbolic of purity. Each person there has been made new, perfect, without blemish. They have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. The multitude waves palm branches in their hands. Just as they welcomed the king into Jerusalem as Jesus made his way into the city to be crucified for our sins, now they again wave the palms in honor of the King.

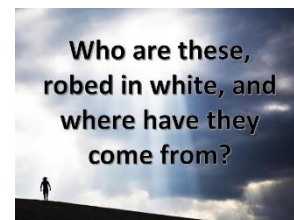
Those gathered around the throne, those singing praises at the tops of their lungs, have come through the great ordeal. They have suffered for their faith. They have been persecuted and abused for their faith. Some have even been martyred for their faith. They have been bruised and beaten by life and now they raise their voices in loud song, praising the one who has brought them into their eternal rest. For some folks that we know, they feel beaten and bruised by life. Life has worn them down and they need a hope to cling to. The glorious

vision of heaven that John shares is indeed hope for those struggling with life. It is proof that the world does not win. It is proof that Jesus triumphs in the end.

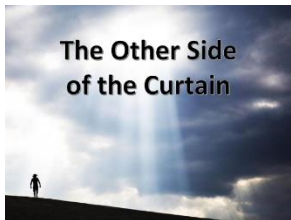


Perhaps some of you here today need to hear this hope. Life can be hard. It can be hard to just get by at times. If that is your situation, if this is how you feel, know that Jesus Christ wants to bring you hope. Know that Jesus Christ offers a peace that will carry you through any trial that this life can bring. Know that Jesus Christ will give you whatever you need to live this life, knowing that a glorious eternal life ultimately awaits all who call on Him as Lord and Savior. If you feel lost and broken, know that Jesus wants to carry your burdens and wants you to live a life of joy and peace and contentment. And that is in the here and now. This vision of heaven that John shares in today's passage is just icing on the cake.

Part way through our passage for today John returns to those robed in white. They have felt lost and broken. They have felt beaten down and abused. But through faith in Jesus Christ, they now stand before the throne and worship the Lamb. One of the elders asks John, "*Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from*"? It is a rhetorical question. The elder knows that John does not know who they are, so he is not surprised when John looks to him for an answer. The elder explains, saying, "*These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*". They have been tested and they have held onto their faith



and they have remained true to Jesus Christ. They have stood firm throughout the "*great ordeal*" and they have been found righteous. Because of this, their robes have been cleansed in the blood of the Lamb. It is a powerful image. The suffering and the stains of our worry and doubt and fear are washed clean. They are not made clean by their own doing, but by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. It is through His own suffering on the cross that Jesus is able to redeem their suffering. It is through that same cross that Jesus redeems our suffering and brokenness.

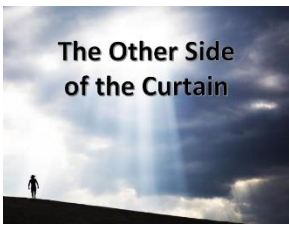


The Book of Revelation was also a reminder for the early Christians that death and persecution were constant realities.

Depending on where you called home, persecution was a given. In many of the cities with fledgling churches, they were living in the midst of a society that worshipped many different gods and immorality was the norm of the day. To go against the norm often drew scorn and derision. If a Christian would stand up and speak out against the ills of society, it would often lead to persecution and sometimes to martyrdom. In those cities with large Jewish populations, they were persecuted for being members of "the Way". Refusal to recant or deny their faith could lead to being martyred. Although we do not know this type of persecution here in our country, many around the world relate well to what the early church endured.

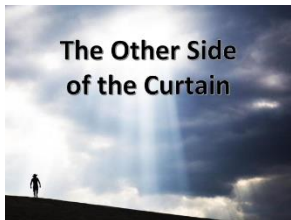


Whenever a member of the church would die, the living would gather near where they had been martyred or outside the catacombs where they were buried to remember that person's faith. Just as all Christians since then have come to know, they too realized that their faith did not come out of nowhere. Those gathered to remember acknowledged and were grateful for those who had gone before, leaving behind a faithful witness to the faith. They were thankful for the inheritance that had been passed down to them by those who had come before. We reflect this idea today on All Saints' Sunday, when we take time to remember those who have gone before, those who poured into our lives, those who have helped shape us into the Christian we are today.



Each of us has been through an ordeal. Each of us has been lost or broken. Each of us has experienced loss and pain and grief. As we allow our faith to be what carries us through and to be what sustains us in the darkness, we come to trust in God to be present the next time. When we give our grief or our hurt or our pain or our brokenness to God, He lifts it up from us. When we experience God's abiding love and presence in the midst of a time of need, we are assured that He will be there again and again. As our faith grows, we come to believe that death and pain do not have the final word.

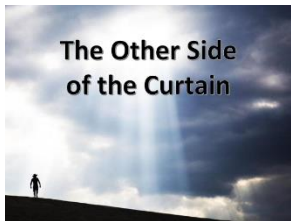
There are many people in our lives and in our community who are in the midst of an ordeal. They are lost or broken. They are experiencing loss and pain and grief. If not now, they soon will. Death and loss and hurt are all part of life. They too need to hear the good news of Revelation 7: 9-17. Those who do not know Jesus do not know true hope and peace. Those who are not in a saving relationship with Jesus Christ do not know real contentment in this world or the promise of life eternal. They need the good news of Revelation 7. They cannot see what we can see. They cannot see the truth revealed in our passage today: that we are all in God's family and that one day we can all sit together at the great feast, gathered together, robed in white, cleansed by His blood. That is the message from today that we are called to share with our brothers and sisters who are lost and broken and hurting.



This message of hope and forgiveness and salvation is also the message that we cling to today as we each come to the table of grace. Each time we gather together as the body of Christ, we are strengthened and encouraged by one another as we walk out our life of faith.

To close, I would like to share an excerpt from a memorial service led by Reverend Robert C. Morris. It reminds us of what the life of a saint is like and of what the transition to the eternal is like.

*Death is like the sailing of a ship. The watcher on the seashore sees her spread her white sails to the morning breeze and start for the blue ocean. She is an object of beauty and strength. We stand and watch her until at length she hangs like a speck of white cloud just where the sea and sky come down to mingle with each other. Someone says, "There -- she's gone," and we find ourselves asking, "Gone where?" "Gone from my sight -- That's all. She is just as large in mast and hull and spar as she was when she left my side, and just as able to bear her load of living freight to the places of destination." Her diminished size is in me, not in her. And just at the moment, when someone at my side says, "There -- she's gone," there come other voices ready to take up the glad shout, "There she comes!" And so it is when one passes from this life into the Great Beyond.*



This view to the other side of the curtain is the hope of our faith. In death, we know that Christ has the last word. He welcomes each faithful believer into heaven and to the room prepared for them. There we will one day dwell in the love and light of God Almighty. There will be pure joy as we too join the crowd around the throne, offering our voices to the chorus of praise. Jesus *"will guide us to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from our eyes"*. For our place in the body of Christ this day and for our inheritance to come one day, we give our thanks and praise. All glory and power be to God almighty, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Amen.



**GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

- 1) How have experiences with loss and brokenness helped you to grow in your faith? With whom could you share these experiences?
- 2) Who do you know that is broken or lost or in pain or sorrow? Spend a few minutes this week praying for God's love and presence to be made known.
- 3) How can you share your stories of God's healing and redemption in your life as a way to serve and glorify God? How can you tell the story?