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Feast of All Saints  
3 November 2013  
Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita  
Revelation 7:2-17; Mt 5:1-12

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit*

The Feast of All Saints is best told in poetry.

Poetry is a higher way of communicating.

It's elegant, rich, and beautiful,

not crass, like the way we typically talk to each other.

But poetry is sometimes hard to grasp—

it takes some time and work to hear what's being said,

sometimes you've got to hear it two or three times before it clicks—

so it goes with All Saints.

It takes some work to hear what's said in today's feast.

Because the Feast of All Saints commemorates a mystery.

And that mystery is the Church.

Today we catch a glimpse of what the Church is—

both militant and triumphant,

saint and sinner,

earthy and heavenly.

And yet there aren't two churches, but One, Holy, Christian, and Apostolic Church.

It's a day where we can remember those who have passed to the other side of the veil;

and not just the hero saints, but the ordinary sort, that most have long forgotten—

our loved ones,

those from this congregation, [even those who just recently left us, like Bill.]

Like poetry, the day is also best captured by art.

There's the cover of your bulletin for starters, which you could analyze all day for the theology.

But then there's the picture drawn by the vision in Revelation:

*"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number,*

*from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages,*

*standing before the throne and before the Lamb,*

*clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,*

*and crying out with a loud voice,*

*'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne,*

*and to the Lamb!'*

*And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying,*

*'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power*

*and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.'"* (Rev 7:9-12)

Notice how real it all is.

Notice the people, the skin colors, the dialects, the voices!  
 Notice what they're wearing—the white robes—and what's in their hands: palm branches!  
 Notice the volume: it's loud, but it's beautiful.  
 This is the singing church.  
 It's the gathering of all saints of all times in all places together around the one God and Lord.

And then notice *what* they're singing.  
 They're confessing who God is:  
     He's the One with salvation.  
     He sits on the throne.  
     He lives and reigns as One God, forever.

And then notice how the angels chime in as well.  
 With faces bowed to the ground in utter humility, the angels also proclaim who this God is:  
     He's the one with *blessing* and *glory* and *wisdom* and *thanksgiving* and *honor* and *power*  
     and *might*!

He is the one to whom all those gathered give their "Amen."  
 That is, it is to Him that all cry "Yes, yes, it shall be so!"

That's the picture of heaven.

But that's not what we see.  
 Our eyes behold different pictures,  
     almost a different reality.  
 Our ears hear a different language—coarser and less beautiful.

The picture we have here on earth is also a picture of the church—  
     but it's far from glorious.

What we see is a room full of people too ashamed to speak what's really on their hearts.  
 The conversation is always self-centered:  
     from the youngest infants here, all the way to our most elderly, including the pastor too.

Our lives are very un-poetic.  
 In fact, there are days and even years we'd rather skip right over, and never take a second look.  
 There are lies we've told and pictures we've seen and thoughts that still scar us.

And when we sing, even when we sing the praises of our God—  
     it's never quite the symphony of voices and languages as we see in Revelation.  
     Someone's always off key, and most of you just mouth the words anyhow.

We're not quite there yet.  
 We're far from perfect.  
 The Beatitudes in today's Gospel really don't seem to apply to us.

Our love is misdirected.  
 Our words come back to haunt us.  
 Our eyes are hardly pure.  
 And our heart is worse yet.  
 Rarely are we merciful; and we often prefer war to peace.  
 There's little that's saintly about us—little that can be called, "*Blessed*."

Yet this is the great mystery today:  
     You are the Church.  
     You are the saints of God.  
     You are clothed in the white, baptismal robe of Christ's salvation.

There aren't two churches.  
 Our loved ones haven't *left* us.  
 They aren't somewhere else; and heaven isn't up in the clouds.  
 God doesn't work one way now, and in another way later.  
 There aren't two Christs, or two bodies, or two fleshes—  
     but One Christ, One Body, One Flesh and Blood Jesus *for you*.

What's so startling about today is that this gathering, this Church—  
     all you very real and visible and earthy and unpoetic sinners—  
     this Church is what God says of you.

You are the Church of Revelation.  
 You are the saints.  
 You are the Body of Christ.  
 You are the *blessed*, in all of the beatitudes.

And you are this because you are in Christ,  
     because of what He has done *for you*.

He washed you with His blood and named you with His name.  
 He forgave you with His promise and spoke for you in the Divine courtroom.  
 He feeds you, and unites Himself to you by giving you His own body and blood.

And it's here, at this Communion, that the seemingly two churches of God are united into one.  
 Here, the same Lord Jesus brings heaven to earth,  
     the angelic to the clumsy human,  
     the saint to the sinner, and makes them one.

Here, at this rail, partaking of the bread and the cup, that is, His Body and Blood,  
     we become participants with heaven itself,  
     and with heaven, all the saints.

Do learn to love the Sacrament of the Altar—  
     for this is the meeting place of All Saints.

This is what makes the Church, Church.  
 This is where she gathers and why she gathers.  
 This is where the Lamb is—  
*who takes away the sin of the world.*

And though it looks often very un-poetic,  
 it is in fact, the greatest hymnody, the most beautiful story ever told.

Here we experience now, what we have already in the not yet:  
 joy in the face of sorrow,  
 forgiveness while yet in great sin,  
 and life, in the very midst of death.

And then the poetry.  
 First, from today's Hymn:  
*"Oh, blest communion, fellowship divine!  
 We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;  
 Yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine.  
 Alleluia." (677:4)*

And finally, from a familiar hymn,  
 [from the hymn we just sang at Bill's funeral,] "The Church's One Foundation":  
*"Yet she on earth has union  
 With God, the Three in One,  
 And mystic sweet communion  
 With those whose rest is won.  
 O Blessed heav'nly chorus!  
 Lord, save us by Your grace  
 That we, like saints before us,  
 May see You face to face." (644:5)*

Happy All Saints' Day!

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit*