

Revelation 7:9-17; Matthew 5:1-12; "Signs of Saints"; 11/2/08; All Saints Sunday; Albany UMC

All Saints Sunday is the Church's Memorial Day; it is time to remember those who have died in the faith of Christ; all of us are here because there were other people who helped us one way or another in our faith journey; and it is time for us to give thanks to God for giving us those wonderful people so that we not only live in hope but also pass on our faith to other people.

I was not born into a Christian family. My parents were not Christians when I was little. I remember when I was six or seven years old, there was a Methodist Church not far from our home and we often had people from the church on Sunday afternoons; after worship they came to invite us to the church. Whenever that happened, I remember, my mother never said, "No" to them. She didn't say, "Yes," either.

Sometimes I would show up with other kids at the church during Christmas times or summer vacation Bible schools. But I never went back to church after those special events were over. That was my childhood memory as far as my church experiences are concerned.

Then during my high school period, we moved to a city; the first thing my family did was attend a Methodist church; I also went each Sunday. Pastor Paik of the church is now dead; but he baptized me on the last Sunday of the year 1978, three years after I attended his church.

Before baptism, there was a man I cannot forget, whose name was Mr. Lee, who is long dead. Mr. Lee was one of two Elders in that small congregation. Mr. Lee was maybe in his late sixties or early seventies; one thing I know is that he was not rich; he was a small farmer all along his life; his entire education was maybe 6 years. But everyone in the church respected him; his face was always illuminated; his words were always inspiring; he was a good preacher; his wisdom was always special; so he was like the father of the church.

One day, Mr. Lee approached me saying, "Dear, I understand you were not baptized yet, before the year is over, would you like to be baptized?" Even though he was not the pastor of the church, he really cared about people's souls. When I heard that, for some reason, I felt very good and my answer was automatically, "Yes, I would love to be baptized."

Those days were especially special to me; that was around this time of the year, I had been recovered from my long battle with Tuberculosis; I had been dying but I came back to live; my body was ready to start a new life. But it was not just my body; my spirit, my entire being, was also ready for a new life. So December 31, 1978, the last Sunday of the year, was when I was baptized and I still remember the presence of the Holy Spirit with me that day; it was one of the most memorable moments in my life. Thank God, right after that, two weeks later, I got a college admission letter with a scholarship. My whole life really changed around my baptism.

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And here I am standing here before you as a preacher. I cannot believe this. Looking back now, it was exactly 30 years ago. It is like a dream. It is like a mystery that I am witnessing to you the miraculous love of God here in Albany, California.

I know people say life is like a dream; but I totally feel that. It is just a miracle that I am here. One thing I can say is this: the reason I am who I am and the reason why I am here is totally God's grace. Without the love and care of our God, I couldn't have survived 30 years ago. God has provided men and women, his saints, in every step of my life to nurture and guide me. There have been many people, be they family members or school teachers or friends or church members, who helped me to be who I am.

I am sure the same is true with you. There are many people you remember who brought you to this place today so that here you are in church this morning to worship and praise God!

In today's revelation text, that is what Apostle John says: "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindred, and peoples, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes...."

He is looking at the crowd, all the saints, who went to God ahead of him. Some of them are his friends and colleagues, family members. Life is a mystery; they were all around him some time ago; and all of a sudden, they are up there and he is still down here; and we know we will be up there soon.

We do not know when we will join them up there. But we know that time is coming. So we need to humble ourselves. We need to do an inventory of our lives. We need to check where we are; we need to examine if we are ready!

Look around the pews in this church. How many of our friends and loved ones had been here sitting with you in the past 101 years and died in faith? While they were here, we know some of them had good lives; some of them had tough ones.

But it didn't matter. No matter how good or bad, life itself is a series of trials; life is a war; it is full of tribulations; sometimes we have to deal with enemies from outside but many times we also need to fight the enemies within us; in those fights, sometimes we do good and sometimes we do not good; sometimes we do fall and we do make mistakes. That is who we are.

But here is the good news: God is good. God knows our weakness. Apostle John says: "The crowd he is looking at now is those who had come out of great tribulation, and they are all wearing white robes; no matter how hard their lives were down here, they all look shiny in dazzling white; they are all washed in the blood of Jesus Christ."

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It is not going to be that long; we will be there too shortly. In the mean time, we need to do what we are supposed to do as the followers of Jesus Christ.

That is simple. As we read in Matthew today, we are to be poor in our spirit. We need to have compassion for others; cry for those who cry; rejoice with those who rejoice; have a humble spirit and be merciful to those who need mercies. Try to be peacemakers, not trouble makers in this world.

Be willing to give our lives to those who are in need as much as we can. Be a part of the work Jesus wanted to do in the world.

Life is short; we will not be here long; but these are the things we will carry with us when we stand before our Lord; these are the signs the Lord is expecting you and me, all the saints, to do until the last moment of our lives. Amen.