

"God's Most Amazing Miracles"

Text: Revelation 21:9-17

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ – that same undeserved love that has turned countless sinners into the Communion of Saints – may that same grace be multiplied to each one of you, together with the loving care of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Fellow Saints:

If I were to ask you to list which, in your opinion, are God's most amazing miracles, what would you pick? I know what I'd pick: first me, and then you. You and I are God's greatest miracles. The fact that you and I are today known as God's children – that he refers to us as *saints* - and the fact that we are therefore listed in the Book of Life as heirs of heaven is nothing short of astounding. This morning we are going to examine just how amazing is the miracle of even just one saint.

This morning is All Saints Day, and recognizing the profound miracle of even just one saved sinner gives us ample reason to celebrate this day. How fitting, how right, to praise our God for the priceless benefits and privileges that are ours when we are tied by faith to our Savior-God. The text that will guide and instruct us this morning is God's verbally inspired words found recorded in Revelation Chapter 7, beginning with Verse 9:

^{ESV} **Revelation 7:9-17** *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, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" ¹¹ 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, ¹² saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." ¹³ ¶ Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" ¹⁴ I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ "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. ¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."*

These are God's words. Think of it. The very words of God, recorded and preserved down through the ages so that we also, on this day, might hear and learn from them. That these words would have God's desired effect in our hearts, so we pray, "***Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.***" Amen.

Some are understandably taken aback when conservative Lutherans celebrate All Saints Day. They shouldn't be. This too is a holiday in the Christian Church, but it is a long-neglected holiday. The reason is fairly obvious: man has perverted the good, God-pleasing celebration, replacing it with a nonsensical adoration of man rather than God – of human beings rather than the God who created and saved them. This time, however, there was a twist. This time the perversion came not from our Godless society; this time it came from within – from those who themselves claimed to be Christians. *Society* perverted Christmas and Easter; elements *from within Christendom* perverted All Saints Day.

That is undoubtedly why we are tempted to skip this event, and to pass right from Reformation to Thanksgiving. Is that wise? Is that the will of our God - that we allow the celebration of All Saints Day to be hauled to the curb and carried to the landfill of history? Once we know the facts, it is hard to imagine that such could be the case. Our God wants us to avoid what is bad, certainly, but he also wants us to cling to what is good – and there is much that is good here. The keys to any God-pleasing celebration are focus and direction. Only when the focus and direction of a celebration are upon our God, rather than upon any part of his creation, only then will our God be pleased. Only then can we have any confidence that our actions are right in his sight.

So then, All Saint's Day has been almost irreparably sullied by those misguided souls who believe that forgiveness and other favors can be gained by praying to an approved list of dead people. So the question really is: *Do we do more damage than good by celebrating what has been so thoroughly perverted?* Again, the clear answer is that this celebration is worth saving. The reason is both straightforward and simple: *Our commemoration of All Saints Day is worth it because our God is worth it.* Remember, God is supposed to be the focal point for this and every other celebration. He is to be the center or heart of all that we do. Consider how we end each Lord's Prayer: "***...For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.***" Those are not just words; they are facts. The words rightly say "For thine IS..." not "should be..." Nor are they exaggerations; they are actually *understated* truths. They are *understated* in that mortal human beings really cannot fully comprehend just how worthy our immortal God is of our praise and adoration in absolutely every aspect of life. Since "***every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father,***" it is also then true

that that same God is worthy of thanksgiving, praise, and honor for an infinite number of big and little things in our lives every single day.

Why should All Saint's Day be any different? On this day we sing the praises of our God for the grace given to all the believers who have been brought to, preserved, and carried home in the one true saving faith. Think for just a moment about how worthy such a celebration really is. Once you get past the notion that a saint is a human being with more good works than sins (every believer, by the way, is sinless in God's sight through faith in Jesus Christ) and once you remember that this celebration is directed to God rather than man, nothing could be more natural than to celebrate God's victories in connection with saved sinners.

In fact we do ourselves a great disservice when we fail to make a big deal about the rescue of even *one sinner*. Why is this such a great disservice? Because it *is* a big deal. The rescue of a human being is nothing short of miraculous. Every single Christian who dies in the faith is an eternal victory over humanly insurmountable odds.

Are you having trouble grasping the magnitude of every such victory? Think about it in these terms. Every single one of us started our lives as a spiritual failure. The deck, as it were, was stacked against us. We had lost before we even started because we were born "***dead in trespasses and sins.***" In fact this is one of the clearest truths taught in Scripture. We could never keep God's command to be holy because we were *born* sinful. Even the youngest child here this morning was born that way. Hardly seems fair, does it? We also understand that human beings have added a never-ending supply of sins to those with which we were born. Original (birth) sin sealed our doom before we even took our first breath, but every one of us did more than enough to condemn ourselves even without original sin. Still God rescued us.

What is even more remarkable about the salvation of any sinner has to do with the enemies we face. How can any human being possibly do battle against an enemy that we can't even see. Even worse, apart from Jesus Christ we don't even have any weapons that could possibly be effective in such a struggle. Even *worse yet* is the fact that this unseen, indefensible enemy has a traitorous ally that remains inside every human being - our own sinful flesh. In other words, there is a part of each one of us that actually *sides with our enemy*, and it *lobbies continually toward that end*.

Makes one wonder how could things get any worse? It can, since we also acknowledge a total inability for any sinner to choose the right path to heaven. Add to that the fact that there is only one path – through faith in Jesus Christ – and that *someone else* has to show us that path (we cannot find it on our own) and then the Holy Spirit has to work through that message of salvation to bring us to faith. All that, and that's literally just the start. From that point on, and every single day of our lives thereafter, the devil and his allies will try to rob us

of the saving faith that we have been given. I can't speak for you, but if I had no one but myself to stand guard, I would certainly and quickly fall.

How in the world can anyone at all ever be brought to faith, let alone kept or preserved in that faith? ***Thanks be to God, who gives us such a victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!*** Only God could do something that great, which is why our God most certainly is worthy of eternal praise, honor, and glory for every single sinner he rescues from an eternity in hell and blesses instead with immortality in heaven.

The Godless haven't a clue as to how or why anyone is saved. The most common idea is that God judges a human being's relative goodness and allows into his heaven all that are "good." Yet the Bible calls God the Father a *Righteous Judge* for a reason. To correctly dispense justice, even a secular judge cannot just set aside the law; he is sworn to uphold it. So too God the Father cannot simply overlook the transgressions of sinners and reward them with heaven for "doing their best" or some such silliness. No one is rewarded with heaven for being a "good guy." Every sin demands payment, and here there are only two options: you pay the eternal death penalty for every single sin, or the debt is charged to Jesus Christ. That is why it is well said that the only sin that damns is unbelief. Unbelief is a rejection of Jesus and his gift of salvation. It is a personal denial that Jesus did what he said he did – and it is therefore an eternal death-sentence.

For this reason the notion that God will offer free general admission to heaven on Judgment Day to anyone who does *not* believe in Jesus Christ is simply wrong. Damnably wrong. It is not only impossible, the very thought that it *is* possible can and does wreak havoc with a naïve, unbelieving world. Divine justice would not, could not allow it. He that believes will certainly be saved. He that believes *not* will just as certainly be condemned, no matter how socially good a man or woman appears on the outside.

Given all of this, we truly stand in awe of the miracle that God has worked in every Christian – both bringing us to faith and keeping us in the faith until the very end of our lives on earth. How fitting and proper, therefore, to set aside a day – or at least a worship service – to marvel at the goodness of our God and sing his praise for souls delivered from the eternal torments of hell.

Here is where our text comes into play. Our text is a visual representation of heaven – the place where God will dwell for all eternity with the saints. Understand that heaven itself is beyond human description. It is a place of joy and bliss that is immeasurably greater than our ability to comprehend. That is why God in our text gives the Apostle John a special "artist's rendition" of what heaven will be like, using human words to relate to the

human mind that which really lies beyond the ability of human words to describe. In other words, we are undoubtedly mistaken if we expect heaven to actually look like a city, especially a city with huge pearls for gates and streets of gold. These descriptions are intended to magnify the image of heaven in our minds, but heaven itself will be so much more. All the things we know today will be dramatically altered and unimaginably improved. Things as simple as lighting, since in heaven the very presence of God eliminates the need for any other light source. We will have no churches or temples, for we will reside in the very presence of the true object of every worship service – God himself. Obviously nothing impure or unclean could ever enter such a place, for there will be no death there, no sickness or corruption of any kind. Especially poignant in our text is the assurance that in heaven there will be no more sorrow – God himself wiping the tears from our eyes.

How then could any of us, foul creatures that we all are, ever be admitted into such a perfect, holy place? The answer lies not in us but, again, in Jesus. Our text introduces all believers with these words: ***"These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 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."*** That's you and me. That's every single sinner who has or will die with saving faith in their heart. That's the Holy Christian Church – the very bride of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. You and I can enter such a perfect, holy place only because we have been cleansed by Jesus himself – by the blood he shed for us on the cross when he paid for our sins. How can blood be used to wash anything? The filth we had was spiritual; it was the corruption of sin, and as John also tells in his First Epistle ***"the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin."*** (1 John 1:7)

There's still more cause for celebration. While I'm really not a big "make-over" guy (obviously) this is something different. At the resurrection of the dead, every single member of the communion of saints gets the ultimate make-over. Everything bad, cumbersome, unclean, or undesirable in any way is removed forever, and we are left with holy, glorified bodies – forever. Pain, sorrow, death, decay – gone, eternally. Joy, comfort, security, immortality – ours for all eternity.

Our God has done this for us. Countless thousands have already been rescued, and are now asleep in the perfect comfort of their Lord's enfolded arms, awaiting only the final call to resurrection. You know and love many of them. Will you be among them? With Jesus as your Savior, you need have no doubt. With faith in Jesus as your Savior, your place too has been secured. God grant that we learn to appreciate our privileged place among the Communion of Saints, and the amazing miracle that is every rescued sinner. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **1 John 3:1-3** See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

^{ESV} **Matthew 5:1-12** Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: ³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. ⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. ⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. ⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. ⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. ⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. ¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ ¶ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

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All Saints Sunday – November 6, 2016

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 437 (Red Hymnal)

"Who Trusts in God, a Strong Adobe"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Epistle Lesson: (1 John 3:1-3) John in this lesson marvels at the Christian privilege of being called children of God. Yet he also notes how tragically ironic that being known by the One True God means that we are unknown by the world. One day, all will be revealed and the truth will be both obvious and irrefutable. God preserve us in the saving faith until that day, can fill us with love and courage to share what we have been given.

Psalm of the Day – Psalm 91 (Supplement page 33) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (Matthew 5:1-12) A saint is rightly defined as one who has no sin in God's eyes. All Christians are therefore saints, since God has placed all of our sins on Jesus and therefore sees them no more. Yet there are other characteristics of God's children of which we ought to be aware. Several were outlined by Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount. Our second lesson contains the opening verses of that great Sermon. We are saved by grace through faith alone, but we thank our God with our lives.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 467 (Verses 1-3, 7) (Red Hymnal)

"Built on the Rock the Church doth Stand"

The Sermon – Text: Revelation 7:9-17 (Printed on the back page)

"God's Most Amazing Miracles"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn - 371 (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus Thy Blood and Righteousness"

The Offering

The Prayers followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Closing Hymn - 283 (Red Hymnal)

"God's Word Is Our Great Heritage"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance - Sunday (51) Ave (48)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship/Coffee Time
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship/Coffee Time

CLC News – Pastor David Baker has returned the call to Grand Rapids.

Pastor Matthew Ude has accepted the call to Faith of Markesan, WI.

Pastor Todd Ohlmann has accepted the call to become the full time CLC Visiting Missionary. Pastor Michael Gurath has returned the call to Zion of Atlanta, GA. St. Stephen of Mountain View and Hayward have called Pastor Luke Bernthal of Valentine, NE.

Camp Help Needed – Counselor applications for CLC Youth Camp 2017 are now open. The Youth Camp will be held at the ILC Campus in Eau Claire, WI from June 18-24. More information is available on the camp Facebook page: www.facebook.com/summeryouthcamp. If you don't have Facebook, send an email to youthcamp.clc@gmail.com and they will send you the information. They are also looking for kitchen staff.

Mission Helper Trip – Plans are underway for a Mission Helper Trip to Nepal in the summer of 2017. More information is available at www.MHT.LutheranMissions.org.

ILC Visitors' Day – ILC Visitors' Day is scheduled for Friday, November 11 on the campus of Immanuel Lutheran College in Eau Claire, WI. Activities include visiting classes, touring the campus, and attending the fall musical. Even if you are not considering entering the preaching or teaching ministries, ILC also offers a high quality two-year AA degree, and most credits transfer to other colleges and universities. More information is available from the Pastor.