**Sermon- All Saints Nov 2-3, 2019**

**Title: “All Saints” (Signed, Sealed, Delivered)**

**Text: Rev. 7:2-17**

**Prayer**

**Salutation**

**Bridge**

 **I’m sure that most of you have heard the old spiritual, “When the Saints Go Marching in”. The chorus goes like this:**

**Oh, when the saints go marching in,**

**Oh, when the saints go marching in,**

**Oh, Lord I want to be in that number,**

**When the saints go marching in!**

 **I don’t know about you, but I sure want to be in that number! But wait! I do know about you. In fact, like almost every time I begin a sermon, we pray for the coming of Jesus. I know you want to be included in that number as well! For that great multitude of the saints who go marching into God’s eternal kingdom- that’s the only place anyone in their right mind would ever want to be when that day comes! BUT that will happen *only if we are numbered with those saints!* That means we need to be signed, sealed and delivered, just like a letter from USPS! What do I mean? Let’s see…and it brings these other questions: What is “All Saints’ Day?” Why do we observe it? What do we mean by the term “saints”? What do I mean about this “signed, sealed and delivered”?**

**Well, let’s first talk about “All Saints’ Day.” What’s the purpose of this day in the church year? It has a long history. In the early years of the Christian church, it was customary to gather at the gravesite of a departed brother or sister on the anniversary of their death, to commemorate that person who had died *in the faith* and now was with the Lord. Over the centuries, this practice came to be transferred to just one day, toward the end of the church year, when the church would remember all the faithful departed from that congregation who had died over the previous year. That is what is being done in thousands of congregations all over the world today, on this first Sunday in November. Now of course there are saints’ days for all the big -name saints during the year, like St. Andrew, St. Mary, St. Mathew, etc., etc. When I was a young man, I read about many of them and their lives, and contribution to the kingdom of God. But, on All Saints’ Day, we remember the Christians who have gone before us who don’t have a day on the calendar, whose names are not well known.**

**But the Lord knows their names! He has not forgotten them, and they are with Him. This- is what we celebrate on All Saints’ Day.**

**Law**

 **Now, the term “saints”. What exactly do we mean by that? For most folks, when they hear the word “saints”, they immediately think of certain individuals who have been canonized by the RC Church. But WE are using the term in a broader sense than that. The word “saints” literally means “holy ones”. But then we have to ask: What do you mean by “holy”? To be “holy”, in Biblical thinking, means “belonging to God”. Holy days, holy places, holy things, holy people- these, are all as such, they are holy, because they have been set apart from ordinary use to belong to God alone. We are, “set apart to belong to God”. That’s the idea behind “holy”, and that tells us, therefore, *who* the “saints” are.**

 **The amazing thing is, is that is what we are! Yes, we are the “saints”! The “holy ones.” But wait, you might say, “Look Pastor, I know who I am, and I am sure that I’m not holy. Not one bit!” Well, you know what? Neither am I! In myself, that is, in this flesh, according to the sinful nature, I am not one bit holy. I am not pure, clean, or morally upright, however you want to define “holy” in that sense. No, I am a sinner, and so are you. So how is it that we sinners are called “holy”?**

 **It’s because we have been “set apart” to belong to God. This is not our doing, but His. He is the One who makes us holy. God has taken us rebels, sometimes by the scruff of the neck, and dragged us to the baptismal font over there, and washed us clean and pure. We don’t deserve it, we didn’t do anything to merit it, but GOD CHOSE to wash us in holy Baptism. And there’s that word “holy” again. In Holy Baptism, God makes us HIS holy people. This is where we’ve been signed and sealed, and in the end, THIS is how we will be delivered. (Sat. Baptism mention.)**

 **You have been signed. At your baptism, the sign of the holy cross was placed on you: “Lillian”, you are a perfect example because you are baptized on this All Saints’ Day in this way, “Lillian, receive the sign of the holy cross upon your + heart, to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified.” You see, baptized Christians, you have been signed, signed with the cross. And it is there-forever. Right here, on your heart.**

 **And the cross of Christ is the only thing that *will* save you. The blood that the Son of God shed on that cross, paid for all of your sins. Indeed, for the sins of the whole world. Then that cross is placed on you, applied to you- personally, in Holy Baptism. Again, it’s God’s doing all the way- Christ dying on the cross, then God applying the cross to you in Baptism.**

**YOU- ARE SIGNED HOLY SAINTS!**

**Gospel**

 **All of your sins are washed away! It’s like the great multitude we see in the Book of Revelation, standing clothed in white robes before the Lamb: “They have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb”. That- is the only solution, literally, to get the stain of sin out: the blood of Christ, shed on the cross. And you have been signed with that cross.**

**So, that’s the first thing: You have been signed. Now, what about sealed? Yes, you have been sealed as well. God has placed His seal upon you, again, at your Baptism. That is when you received the name of the Triune God upon you: The Father, The Son, The Holy Spirit. You *belong* to God! You are His. He put His name on you. He sealed you. That is, He sealed you with the Holy Spirit and put His seal of protection upon you. In a way, God has enrolled us in His own “witness protection program”. As we bear witness to our Lord, in this hostile world, we do so under God’s protection. In Baptism, we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit. He will guard and keep us in the true faith, so that the world cannot harm us. Oh, the world may persecute us- it may do all kinds of things to us, but the world cannot harm us! The world cannot separate us from our God. The world cannot strip us of our faith. It cannot take our eternal life from us. God will see to it. We have been sealed.**

**Conclusion**

 **And so, signed and sealed, and we will be delivered. That is the final outcome of our faith. Salvation. Divine deliverance. God will graciously take us form this vale of tears to Himself in heaven. We will come out of this time of tribulation. “Deliver us from Evil” we pray. And delivered from evil we will be.**

 **Even now, those who have departed this life in the faith- those Christians whom we have known and loved- they now rest from their labors, and their souls are with the Lord. Together we await the day of resurrection, when our Lord Jesus will return and raise up our bodies, new and glorious! That will be the final deliverance, which is already our sure and certain hope, as sure as Christ’s own resurrection, to which we were united in baptism.**

 **So know that all the saints who have gone before us- they are rejoicing with us on this All Saint’s Day. They know the victory Christ has won for us. It’s not just we here who are celebrating today. Besides all of our fellow Christians around the world, the one Holy Christian Church includes all the Saints we remember but do not see on this day.**

 **You know that line in our communion liturgy, “Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious name?” Yes, “with all the company of heaven”. They are joining us today- or rather, WE are joining them, in their song of praise to God and to the Lamb. And we tell you this often.**

 **Pastor Curt has explained why we built this rail around the altar the way we did. It’s in the shape of a half circle. It stops at the back of the chancel for more than the reason that we ran out of room! Ya know, back up in Minnesota where I’m from, where there are many Scandinavian Lutheran churches, the way the rails are built is as if it extends beyond the wall, where they have placed their church cemetery. There’s a reason for that. A Swedish churchman named Bo Giertz explains it well:**

 **“Where the circle ends at the chancel wall, the fellowship still continues; in the churchyard is the resting place of the dead, the Lord’s faithful, who now are partakers of the great banquet in heaven. They are with us as a great cloud of witnesses, they continue the small circle of people around the altar in my parish church, a circle that widens and is extended both back in time through the centuries and forward into the eternal world. It is a table fellowship without end. Shoulder by shoulder they are with us: our own faithful ancestors who once received the sacrament here at this altar, saints and martyrs elsewhere through the ages, and finally the Lord Himself and His apostles in the glorious kingdom in heaven above where the circle comes to its conclusion. This is “communion sanctorum” the communion of saints in Christ’s kingdom of grace. Celebrating the Lord’s Supper with my brothers and sisters in Christ, I am connected with the saints who sit at the Lord’s Table in the heavenly kingdom. I am counted as one of God’s Holy people.”**

 **“Counted as one of God’s Holy people”. Not only do we say, “Lord I want to be in that number”, the good news is, WE ARE! For you and I have been signed, marked with the sign of the cross of Christ. We have been sealed, sealed with the Holy Spirit, who will protect and keep us until the end. And so, we will be delivered, you and I will be numbered with the saints in the glory everlasting. Yes, we fellow saints of God: Signed, sealed, delivered- you are His! In Jesus name, Amen.**