

Scripture Readings and Sermon

November 1, 2020 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Revelation 7:9-17 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

This reading from Revelation occurs after the Lamb has broken the sixth seal and before the seventh seal. The first six seals have brought the four horsemen as well as great natural disasters. There is then a pause so that the servants of God from the twelve tribes of Israel on earth can be marked on the forehead - twelve thousand from each of the tribes. The scene then returns to heaven with the reading today. The multitudes are once again praising the "worthy" lamb with the seven fold blessing in verse 12. When asked where the robed people came from, the response is that they "have come out of the great ordeal". At this point scholars disagree as to whether the robed ones were raptured during the ordeal and are thus living or if they died during the ordeal and are now alive in heaven. What is clear is that they will avoid the battle with the Beast and Satan because they are already enjoying the promise of God's presence in verses 16-17 which parallel 21:3-4. One of the greatest of promise is the God will remove the tears. This is an incredibly intimate gesture by the Master of creation.

Revelations 7:17 God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Has anyone ever gently wiped the tears from your eyes?

How did you feel? Comforted? Embarrassed? Loved?

What if that someone was the Creator of the universe?

What does this promise mean to you especially during difficult times?

Commentary on Matthew 23:1-12 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Just as Jesus cleaned out the money changers, he now turns his attention to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes after silencing their questions. He opens this long dialog (the entire chapter) by stating the standard against which those in the Temple should be judged. While the authorities view their job as maintaining the Temple and both interpreting and enforcing the religious law, Jesus argues that their calling is to people into a closer relationship with the LORD. An example of this misinterpretation of their calling is the use of phylacteries. Continuing his interpretation of the greatest commandment from Deuteronomy 6:5, Deuteronomy goes on to say that this command to love God should be bound "as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead"(6:8). Taking this literally, small boxes called phylacteries, containing the words from Deuteronomy, are tied to the hand and forehead. Rather spiritually binding their love of God with everything they do (hand) and everything they think (forehead), the authorities have created a ritual that both costs money and focuses on outward piety. This can also be seen in their position in society and the titles they give themselves all of which bring glory to themselves rather than God. Their true calling Jesus argues can only be done through humility and a constant focus on God. It is against this standard they the rest of the "woes" in the chapter are to be judged.

Matthew 23:11 The greatest among you will be your servant.

This All Saints, think of the funerals that you have attended.

Is it the rewards they earned or the love they showed which leaves a lasting memory?

What are some of your most cherished memories of loved ones?

Where they times when you experienced joy, peace, and love or award ceremonies?

How do you want to be remembered?

Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 3:11-4:7 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

The first seven verses of Chapter 4 are not found in the normal lectionary reading but were included because of their explanation of holiness and sanctification. The verses from Chapter 3 introduce the theme of holiness as well as tie into All Saints Day. Continuing with the theme of waiting and holiness, Paul prays that the love shown by the Thessalonians increases. This appropriate love is a sign of holiness and is blameless before the God. Love, however, is not fornication. While love is an expression of holiness through a deep caring of self and other, fornication refers to sexual immorality. It should be noted that in Greek, fornication is not simply sex but rather sexual immorality. Abstinence from sex will quickly lead to the dying out of all Christians. Sex, a gift of God given to Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:16), is not evil but rather part of the natural created order. The use of sex to fulfill "lustful passion" which diminishes the goodness of both parties through objectification is fornication. Sanctification is the restoration of not only the soul but the entire person back to that created goodness. Any action which exploits or uses another for personal pleasure or gain distorts this original goodness in both parties. We are called to holiness which brings joy and peace rather than shame and guilt.

1 Thessalonians 4:3 "this is the will of God, your sanctification"

What is the connection between love, holiness, and sanctification?

What does it mean that God wants only the best for you?

If God wants the best for you, what is standing in your way of being who God created?

Are you an obstacle from another person becoming who they were created to be?

By your actions? Your words? Your apathy?

Sermon "How Sainly Are You?" (*Sermon [Video](#)*)

The scriptures this morning give us a glimpse of the attributes of a saint or at least a really good Christian. In the early days of the Christian church, individual's were lifted up as examples as to how a Christian should live their life. The apostles, of course, pointed to the life of Jesus but soon first hand accounts of Jesus began to fade into legend or recorded in the Gospels.

People, like the Thessalonians, looked to the examples of Paul to see what it meant to be a follower of Jesus. Paul then told them to be examples to all who knew them. This was more than just a few random acts of kindness but daily living a life that exemplified the love of God in Jesus Christ. This was what it meant to live a holy life made possible through the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit. Holiness means to treat one another as precious children of God with respect. Rather than viewing sex as fornication (sexual immorality) which degrades people as objects to be used for lustful self gratification, it is viewed as an act of mutual edification of an intimate relationship and the promise of growing stronger together in that relationship. Paul, however, was not just referring to sex but in all aspects of how we are to treat one another. Every relationship should seek the best for the other as a child of God without exploitation or self serving motives. A true saint is one who has shown the same love for others that Jesus first showed to everyone he met.

A saint, however, does not need a statue or a special day but rather through their humility showed the power of God. As the church grew, the Roman Empire began a devastating persecution of Christians through various means of torture and death. Those who humbly accepted death rather than renounce Jesus became examples of God ultimate expression of love of Christ on the cross. Martyrs (Greek: witnesses) soon joined the ranks of the apostles as examples of what it meant to be a Christian. Unlike the religious officials that Jesus criticized for their self promotion, these saints exemplified Jesus' call for humility and service.

These martyrs, however, placed the holiness bar often too high for the ordinary Christians. They

needed role models of people like themselves who showed God's love in their everyday life. With the fall of Rome and the dark ages of Europe, people needed these example of love in difficult times. They needed to know that Jesus was coming back and that God would wipe every tear from their eyes. It was at this point that the church in Rome began to canonize official "Saints". Individual's who overcame hardships to exemplify the love of God through humility and love. Today we recognize all of the saints in our lives who wiped our tears, treated us as children of God, and never sought the spotlight for themselves but rather gave praise to God in all they did. May we live lives such as this.