ALL SAINTS' DAY

Year A

This Bible study was written by ***the Rev. Michael Thompson*** *of* ***Bexley Seabury Seminary****.*

Revelation 7:9-17

9 After this I looked, and there was a great multitude
that no one could count, from every nation, from all
tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the
throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with
palm branches in their hands. 10 They cried out in a
loud voice, saying,

> "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated
> on the throne and to the Lamb!"

11 And all the angels stood 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 singing,

> "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, robed in white, and where have they come
from?" 14 I said to him, "Sir, you are the one who
knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who
have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed
their robes and made them white in the blood of the
Lamb.

> 15 For this reason they are before the throne of
> God and worship him day and night within
> his temple, and the one who is seated on the
> throne will shelter them.
> 16 They will hunger no more and thirst no
> more; the sun will not strike them, nor any
> scorching heat,
> 17 for the Lamb at the center of the throne will
> be their shepherd, and he will guide them to
> springs of the water of life, and God will wipe
> away every tear from their eyes."

Commentary from Michael Anderson

For all the interpretive challenges Revelation offers, it also provides us some beautiful ways of understanding how God intended creation to be, God's work to course-correct creation onto the path God intended, and the eschatological fulfillment of God's intention. Revelation's placement at the end of the Bible canon compels us to refer to the beginning: Genesis. Our Scriptures begin with God creating everything and proclaiming each thing and the whole of creation good – indeed, very good. Unfortunately, humanity misused the gift of freedom God lovingly gave us. We created division and strife, strayed from that original goodness, and took creation with us. Through the prophets, Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, and coming of the Holy Spirit, God was always working to restore us and all creation to the goodness God originally intended. That's the context in which we arrive at this passage from Revelation.

Here, we glimpse things as they should be and will be. There is an innumerable multitude as diverse as imaginable (as God created and intended), yet they are all united in their love and adoration of their Creator. They stand in peaceful and loving relationship with one another and to the God who loved them into being and loved them into salvation (again, as God created and intended). They need nothing apart from God – not food, not water, not shade. They are returned to the Garden, where their delight and trust rest wholly in God and their joy is in walking with God.

Discussion Questions

If you were to imagine creation as God intended, what would it look like?

How can that image become manifest even as we await Christ's coming again?

Psalm 34:1-10, 22

1 I will bless the LORD at all times; *
his praise shall ever be in my mouth.
2 I will glory in the LORD; *
let the humble hear and rejoice.
3 Proclaim with me the greatness of the LORD; *
let us exalt his Name together.
4 I sought the LORD, and he answered me *
and delivered me out of all my terror.
5 Look upon him and be radiant, *
and let not your faces be ashamed.
6 I called in my affliction and the LORD heard me *
and saved me from all my troubles.
7 The angel of the LORD encompasses those who fear him, *
and he will deliver them.
8 Taste and see that the LORD is good; *
happy are they who trust in him!
9 Fear the LORD, you that are his saints, *
for those who fear him lack nothing.
10 The young lions lack and suffer hunger, *
but those who seek the LORD lack nothing that is good.
22 The LORD ransoms the life of his servants, *
and none will be punished who trust in him.

Commentary from Michael Anderson

There is a beautiful irony to this psalm. The superscription (which is omitted from the lectionary) ties this psalm to David's pretending to be insane, an apparent allusion to 1 Samuel 21:10-15. This psalm of thanksgiving and profound faith is attributed to David when he is at a low point. He is on the run. This makes the psalm's praise that much more powerful. On a feast in which we peek at the eschatological realization of our hope, it is apt that we sing a psalm expressing unshakable assurance that, even on the run, God has heard, delivered, and provided for David (and us). This psalm provides a profound example of hope amid adversity and suffering.

Discussion Questions

Where do you find hope when experiencing adversity?

1 John 3:1-3

3 [1] See what love the Father has given us, that we
should be called children of God, and that is what we
are. The reason the world does not know us is that it
did not know him. [2] Beloved, we are God's children
now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What
we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be
like him, for we will see him as he is. [3] And all who
have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is
pure.

Commentary from Michael Anderson

These few verses of First John are packed with eschatological meaning, looking backward to what God has accomplished to understand what will ultimately become our experienced reality. God loves us so profoundly that God gave God's very being – God's Son, Jesus – so that we could live into what we are: Children of God. Yes, we are adopted children, but in the Jewish and Roman contexts of the time, adopted children (really, sons) had all the rights of biological children (again, sons). God takes us so fully into God's family and being that we become what God created us to be: Bearers of God's image. This is so, even if it is not always our experienced reality. Knowing that we are children of God produces two results. First, we seek to respond by conducting ourselves as children of God – purifying ourselves, just as God is pure. Second, we have hope. Despite what we might experience as our reality, we know the truth: God's love extends so far and deeply that we are, ontologically, God's.

Discussion Questions

How do you live out your existence as a child of God?

Matthew 5:1-12

5 When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the
mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to
him. [2] And he began to speak 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 will be
comforted.

[5] "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

[6] "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for
righteousness, for they will be filled.

[7] "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

[8] "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

[9] "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called
children of God.

[10] "Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake
of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[11] "Blessed are you when people 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 in the same way they
persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Commentary from Michael Anderson

Despite their familiarity, the Beatitudes often pose difficulty for Western ears. Often, the Beatitudes are read as God requiring that we be what follows the "blessed" so that we can reap the benefits of everything that follows the "for." The idea that we must be poor in spirit, mournful, persecuted, and reviled in order to access the kingdom of heaven runs counter to everything we want for our lives – and, in the extreme, it could cause some to chase persecution to garner a greater reward in heaven.

What if the Beatitudes *are* intended to run counter to what we consider ordinary, but not quite in the way it might appear? We can hear in the Beatitudes both Jesus' ministry that follows in the Gospel of Matthew and echoes of the prophets who preceded him. Like the prophets and like Jesus' ministry, the Beatitudes show us the stark contrast between our priorities and God's priorities. Where we might work for our own comfort, wealth accumulation, and reputational advancement – perhaps even at the expense of others – God looks first, not to the rich and lofty but to the poor and lowly. God prioritizes the marginalized and oppressed – or, as the prophets urged, the widow and the orphan. God demands justice and liberation on their behalf. And we are called, following the prophets and Jesus' teachings and example, to do likewise. You could read the Beatitudes as urging us to live into our baptismal vows to "seek and serve Christ in all persons," "strive for justice and peace among all people," and "respect the dignity of every human being."

Discussion Questions

How might you realign your priorities with God's priorities?

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