

MESSAGE - A Great Multitude  
November 5, 2023  
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In the revelation that was given to John we receive so many images and symbols and stories that help us to claim the victory over evil and death – even while we are still in the midst of dealing with it.

John wrote this to the early Christian churches that were in the midst of difficulties and persecutions because of the faith. They were wondering if the faith they had in Jesus was being held in vain – because this world was so hard and cruel and filled with darkness. This book of Revelation – as confusing as it might be on the surface – is designed to give us hope and trust in the victory and of what will be.

One part of the message gives us a glimpse into the throne room of God.

SCRIPTURE LESSON            Revelation 7:9-17

<sup>9</sup> After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. <sup>10</sup> And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

<sup>11</sup> All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, <sup>12</sup> saying: "Amen!

Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" <sup>13</sup> Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?"

<sup>14</sup> I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. <sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> 'Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,' nor any scorching heat.

<sup>17</sup> For the Lamb at the center of the throne

will be their shepherd;  
'he will lead them to springs of living water.'  
'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'"

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John is like the proverbial "fly on the wall", getting a picture of a victory celebration with palm branches being waved like streamers and shouting victory chants.

Part of the celebration includes an unmeasurable "multitude" from every part of the world. And John is asked, "Who are they and where did they come from?"

Who are they and where did they come from?

It's a great question for All Saints' Sunday.

And it always gives me pause to reflect on the people I've known through the years.

Obvious people like Jesse. Jesse was a pillar of the community. He was wise, highly respected, and a successful business man. He and his wife lived in a stately home on the corner across from the Methodist church which was always neat as a pin. Not only did he and his wife run a successful "grocery and dry goods" business, they did what was right....even if it cost him. Like in the 60's when Jones hired an African-american man to work in his store. Jones was chastised for that. His business was boycotted by some in the small southern town and his business suffered. But Jones stood by his decision and kept the man on the payroll....because, as a Christian, who believes that everyone is created in the image of God and in Christ there is no Jew or Greek, male or female, but all are one in Christ, it was the right thing to do; it was the faithful thing to do. Over the years, as times changed, his actions were no longer scorned but became celebrated in the community.

Yes, on All Saints' Sunday, I remember the obvious people like Jones.

But this year the holiday has also brought to mind some of the unobvious people like Billy. Billy lived a rough and ready life. Hung with the tougher crowds, the marginal people...the people who couldn't necessarily afford to buy clothes at Jesse's dry goods store. He drank a lot of beer, hunted, had a lot of hunting dogs, and lived for the weekends. He was the guy that everyone gossiped about when he started going to the Methodist church with the woman he was dating: Billy's done got religion. I ended up marrying the two of them and then a couple years later – doing Billy's funeral. And I

remember his statement of faith when I talked with him in the hospital after they knew that the treatments weren't going to work. And I asked him how things were with him and God. Billy said, "me and God – we've got everything worked out". At his funeral I preached from Romans 8: "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus".

Jesse and Billy.

They lived just a few miles from each other, but in many ways, in different worlds.

They knew a lot of the same people, but didn't travel in the same crowds.

They both were buried out of the same congregation, though their lives in faith took very different shapes.

No matter how different they were in this life, they have both joined the one multitude.

And today, I think about the 10 people we have named who have joined that great multitude....carrying the same faith that has played out in different ways in this life:

- Overcoming life obstacles instead of being overcome by them
- Teaching music and life to others
- Holding onto faith no matter the hardship or illness – like Job did: "I know that my redeemer lives"
- Truly loving and celebrating the family she was given and the broader family she found
- Doing your work with honesty and integrity; being trustworthy
- Making family a priority and bringing laughter and joy into the room....which built relationships that enabled her to encourage others
- Raising children in love
- Being hospitable and serving the community in a variety of ways, making the world a brighter place.
- Checking in on neighbors who were ill and grieving
- Being someone people could always count on to be there

Who do you remember today that has carried the faith in this world, has let that faith mold them, has worshipped the Lord, is now a part of the immeasurable multitude?