

Revelation 7:9-17, 1 John 3:1-3, Matthew 5:1-12 – November 3, 2019 (All Saints Day)

There was an interesting video posted on YouTube this past week. A man named Matt Whitman runs a channel called the 10 Minute Bible Hour. It's reasonably popular. He's got about 80,000 subscribers. Gets about half a million views per video. Which in YouTube standards is moderately successful.

Matt is doing a series of videos where he visits churches from different Christian denominations. Attends a service. Interviews a pastor. And gives his impression of that particular church body.

And this week's was the LCMS. So he went to St Paul's Lutheran Church in Hamel, IL, attended a service there, and then interviewed the Rev. Dr. William Weedon. Who, I might add, wrote the book "Thank, Praise, Serve, and Obey" that we recently finished studying in our Sunday morning Bible class. Pastor Weedon is brilliant and funny and energetic. And he did a wonderful job talking to Matt about Confessional Lutheranism.

This particular episode was focused just on the Lutheran worship experience. The building, the liturgy, the symbols, the sacraments. And Matt was simply blown away by it all. He was thoroughly impressed by everything he experienced.

And at the end of the video he said something that was just perfect. He commented, "I expected something from the 16th century. I got something that felt more like all 2000 years of Church happening at once." And, in that, I think he hit the nail on the head. That's exactly what our worship services should feel like.

Last week, I said in my sermon that we shouldn't get too caught up in externals. In the outward appearance of things, like our particular styles of worship. What matters is the doctrine underneath the externals. The Law and Gospel that is preached and practiced.

But it is also possible to go too far the other direction. To care so little for externals that they end up inadvertently obscuring the thing you're trying to preach and practice. And one of the things that we, as Lutherans, preach and practice is the history of Christ's church.

As Matt said, we are not just a church of the 16th century, when Luther was alive. Nor are we just a church of the 19th century, when Walther was alive. Nor are we just a church of the 4th century, when the early church fathers were alive. We are a church of all centuries. All 2000 years happening at once.

And that's a wonderful thing to remember on this All Saints Day. We are the church of all the saints. Saints above and saints below. Saints from the 4th, 16th, 19th, and 21st centuries. Saints that rest from their labors. And saints that diligently continue to fight the good fight of faith, waiting for that crown of glory.

Because you are each a product of 2000 years of church history. Take little Hunter here, for example. Hunter was baptized this morning because his parents brought him to be baptized. Just as they will – hopefully – bring him to church and bring him to God's Word and bring him, one day, to the Sacrament of the Altar.

But his parents brought Hunter to be baptized today because someone brought them to be baptized and to hear God's Word. And someone else brought those people to be baptized and to hear God's Word. And yet more people brought those people to be baptized and hear God's Word. On and on throughout all of history. All the way back to Jesus Christ Himself.

The same thing is true for each and every one of you. No one comes to believe in the saving work of Jesus Christ by themselves. Even if they became a Christian because a Gideon left a Bible in a hotel room... someone proclaimed the good news of God's love to them in some way. As St Paul says, how can anyone hear unless someone preaches to them?

No one becomes of a saint of the Lord without another saint bringing them to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. "Church" is not simply what we do today. "Church" is what has been given to us from the tireless work of the saints for the last 2000 years.

But it also, unfortunately, carries the baggage created by the work of sinners for the last 2000 years as well. Because while Christ's invisible Church may be perfect in every way, the visible institution of the church has had plenty of failures.

It has engaged in violence and deceit. Sexual immorality and theft. It has at times been driven more by pride and power than by love and charity. There's no point in denying it. We as a Lutheran church exist because of those very acts of corruption in the 16th century and Luther's attempts to reform them. But they were happening long before that. And continued to happen long after. Not just in Rome, but in our own church body as well. And in our own lives as well.

Luther writes in his explanation of the 1st petition of the Lord's Prayer that hallowing God's name isn't just something we do verbally. It's not just about what we say that makes God's name holy. Because we each bear God's name upon us.

You heard it this morning: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Little Hunter bears God's name. You bear God's name. Which means everything you do reflects upon God's name. When the world looks you, they say, "This person is a Christian. A disciple of Jesus Christ. What does a disciple of Jesus Christ look like?"

That's a scary thought, isn't it? If it's not, it should be. That should terrify us. And humble us. And baffles us. That we, sinful people that we are, have been entrusted with the holiness of God's name. Why would God do that?

Well, for one, he doesn't entrust us with his name as sinners. He entrusts us with it as his saints. As his baptized children, who have been washed clean in the blood of the lamb.

And he entrusts us with this task not as a burden, but as a blessing. Because the last 2000 years of church history have not been born on the backs of sinners who fail in every task they do. But on the shoulders of saints, uplifted by his Spirit.

I don't know that there is any greater miracle a person could every see than the amazing things God has done through ordinary, sinful men. That is the history of God's people – Old Testament and New Testament.

God takes the poor in spirit and he gives them the kingdom of heaven. He takes those who mourn and he comforts them with the message of the resurrection. He takes the meek and he gives them the ends of the earth as their inheritance. He takes those who hunger and thirst for righteousness because they have none of their own and he satisfies them with the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

He takes the merciful – and the unmerciful – and he has mercy upon us. He takes the pure in heart – and the impure in heart – and he reveals himself to us. He takes the peacemakers – and the stiff-necked – and he calls us all sons of God. He takes those who have evil uttered falsely against them – and those who have evil uttered in complete truth about them – and he gives us a great reward in heaven.

A reward we don't deserve. The reward of saint who stands in God's presence. Who serve God day and night in a way that we never did on earth. Who never again have to feel the curse of Adam, toiling away in the heat against thorns and thistles. Toiling away against the weight of sin and guilt and shame. For we will be led like lambs by our shepherd to springs of living water. And he will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

The reward we receive is a reward not for what we are today. But for what we will become on the last day. When we will be not like our forefather Adam in all our sin, but like our new Adam, Jesus Christ. When we appear like him in all our sainted glory as God's children.

And so today, this All Saints Day, we remember and praise God for all those saints who hoped in Christ and have purified themselves as he is pure. We remember that great multitude that no one can count who lived lives dirtied by sin, but now stand in white robes around the throne of the Lamb.

We remember the 2000 years of history that happens all at once in this sanctuary of sinners and saints, as we join together in the feast of the lamb. And praise him who blesses us with more than we ever deserve. Amen.