

The Rev. Duane A. Jesse, Senior Pastor
Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Weekend of Sunday, November 7, 2021
All Saints Sunday/Lectionary 32/Proper 27/Year B
First Reading: Isaiah 25:6-9
Second Reading: Revelation 21:1-6a
Gospel Reading: John 11:32-44
Sermon Title: "Welcome Home!"

Theme

Of all three years of the lectionary cycle, this year's All Saints readings have the most tears. Isaiah and Revelation look forward to the day when God will wipe away all tears; in John's gospel, Jesus weeps along with Mary and all the gathered mourners before he demonstrates his power over death. On All Saints Day we celebrate the victory won for all the faithful dead, but we grieve for our beloved dead as well, knowing that God honors our tears. We bring our grief to the table and find there a foretaste of Isaiah's feast to come.

Texts

First Reading: Isaiah 25:6-9

⁶On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.
⁷And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all nations;
⁸he will swallow up death forever.
Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken.
⁹It will be said on that day,
Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us.
This is the LORD for whom we have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Second Reading: Revelation 21:1-6a

¹I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them;

⁴he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away.”

⁵And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” ^{6a}Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.”

Gospel Reading: John 11:32-44

³²When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” ³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

³⁴He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵Jesus began to weep. ³⁶So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” ³⁷But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

³⁸Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” ⁴⁰Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” ⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” ⁴³When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

Sermon

"Welcome home!" That's not only the title of the 2022 Annual Stewardship Campaign, but it's also the title of today's sermon because the texts for today speak of homecoming.

The texts for today, All Saints Sunday, are very familiar to me, and maybe to you too. They are some of the most common texts used at funerals, in fact, I used these same texts last Monday at the funeral of William Thomas, a 96-year-old inactive member of this church. Last Monday was November 1, All Saints Day. Because All Saints Day is so significant in the life of the church, it can be a moveable feast day and that is how we end up with All Saints Sunday on November 7 this year.

If it is not obvious, the reason these texts are used so often is that they present an image of the hope we Christians have for what comes next after our mortal lives are over. And this hope comes to us from the great prophets of old who were given visions by God to write down and share with the rest of creation to draw us away from our sinful selves and toward God and the heavenly home God has prepared for us. God tells us in these texts that a life of discipleship is worth living now, and will be rewarded in our futures when all the saints of every time and place are gathered together in one magnificent homecoming.

In the Gospel Reading from John, Jesus raised his friend Lazarus from death, but this is not the raising we should be concerned with. Even the resuscitated Lazarus was only resuscitated to resume his mortal life. A fantastic miracle that his sisters truly appreciated, but he will die again. I am pretty sure you all know that, but that doesn't mean we aren't supposed to be concerned about life in this life.

Speaking of life in this life, I hope you were inspired by the Satterfield family; Steven, Susan, Caleb, and Sadie. If you pay attention to our ever-changing prayer list, then you often see family and friends of the Satterfield's go on and off the list. Just this week, Susan requested prayer for her cousin's grandson, Jace, and his liver donor, Catherine. This is just one example of the many prayer requests that come in from the Satterfield family. I'm neither complaining nor bragging, just stating the truth that the Satterfield's, Steven, Susan, Caleb, and Sadie believe that lifting the names of loved ones before God matters. Furthermore, they believe that in sharing

their concerns with you, you pray for their concerns too and that the prayers of the faithful will, as James wrote, ^{James 5:15} save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up.

Where did they get that faith? If you have observed them as I have, then you have probably met Steven and Susan's parents because they visit often and when they visit, they come to church with the family. They didn't say it in the video specifically, but Steven and Susan were raised in the church by good church-going Christian parents. They, like many of you, don't know any other way to be. And because of the way they were raised, they have chosen to raise their children in the church too. In the video, the family mentioned that their worship on Sunday mornings often resurfaces during the week; something they heard or did while at Zion worshipping or serving, re-enters their lives later in the week at work or school or on the field or in the home.

Caleb and Sadie went to Zion for preschool, so they feel right at home here. I had both of them in confirmation and although they are both excellent and active student-athletes, if they are not required somewhere else, they are here, at their church home, "praising the Lord" as Caleb said.

I'm going to go out on a limb here; I am willing to bet that Caleb and Sadie will stay active in the church throughout their youth and into adulthood, and should they choose to marry and have children, they will likely raise them in the church. They don't know any other way to be, and where else can they go to hear the words of eternal life?

The Satterfield's celebrated a homecoming of sorts when we re-opened Zion in June of 2020 after the pandemic isolation. You heard them mention the warm family feeling they get from us here. As soon as the church was open, they were here, along with the Lawson's and the Bellin's. They find that starting the week worshipping and serving the Lord, properly orients their weeks and their lives.

Well, "Welcome Home!" is not only the title of today's sermon, but it is also the title of the 2022 Annual Stewardship campaign, which I am concluding today.

It was my hope, and the hope of many at Zion, that this fall would have been a homecoming; that our members and regulars, whom we miss dearly, would return, but that has not been the case. We have been soldiering on without them/you. Zion

remains a Mighty Fortress without them/you, but honestly, life at Zion is not and has not been the same without them/you.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

This weekend is the last weekend of the 2022 Annual Stewardship Campaign and the All Saints slide show you will see in a few moments will celebrate a sort of year-end – On All Saints Sunday each year, we remember all those who died in the faith in the last year, as well as other significant events.

As you watch the slide show, I hope you are reminded of the importance and significance that a life of discipleship lived out through your church makes. And I hope that reminds you and every member that, for Zion to continue to be the spiritual home it has been for you and for our faithful members who passed in the last year and for every member who has called Zion home since 1810, you the members must support it. Zion has grown to be a big church in many ways, and many people, members, and friends alike count on us to provide services for them into the future. But, as the Satterfield's and others have said, it is also a warm welcoming place; a place for us to worship God in Christ, grow in faith, and serve in love. We belong here. We belong together.

As the current pastor of this great old church, I get the blessing, yes the blessing of coming to us each year to remind us of our significance as the church. Stewardship is not a dirty word or a thing we have to put up with once a year, it is how we live out our lives of discipleship. And I get the opportunity to remind us of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and God's plan for all who call his Son Jesus Lord of our lives and challenge us to do more – more than we have in all three aspects of personal stewardship.

Now some of you might be thinking, "Isn't he ever satisfied?" That reminds me of the time I met with my Thrivent agent a few years ago. With our children grown and independent, Carol and I had finally gotten to the point where I didn't think we needed some products and I was looking forward to canceling them. Don't you know he not only talked us into keeping them but we even added products! At the end of our meeting, I told him how I was hoping the meeting would have gone the other way, and I'll never forget what he said. He said, "Selling products IS my job."

So, to answer your question, "Isn't he ever satisfied?" it's my job to remind you that none of us has done enough to earn our way up to that mountain about which Isaiah foretold, or that New Jerusalem about which John foretold. None of us have done enough to earn the "resurrection on the last day" that Martha confessed. And just to be clear, no amount of our time, talent, and treasure will be enough either.

But here is the thing, those of us who call Jesus Lord of our lives get all that by God's grace through Jesus Christ, and it's my job to remind us that:

- we have an obligation to give him thanks and praise.
- the church is his creation and he called it his Bride.
- Therefore, we ought to give him thanks and praise the best we can. Jesus Christ our Lord deserves it.

And when our time comes to see him face to face, I promise you, that the only regret that any of us will have is that we did not serve him more while we had the chance.

Prayer

Loving and merciful God, your love and grace are breathtaking. In your wisdom, you draw us to yourself, not with a whip or a bolt of lightning, but with gentle messengers, throughout the ages who give us glimpses of the glory you plan for us, not because we deserve it, but because your Christ makes us righteous in your eyes. Give us wisdom and will to live lives that glorify you. And bless this church we call our spiritual home. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen

Announcement

Now, I have a little bit of business to attend to. All of you members, and I hope many of you regular-attending-non-members, received a letter from me last week along with a commitment card in the mail. I am asking you to fill it out and return it by next weekend. Art Roden, our Treasurer, is the only one who sees it, and he needs to know what your commitment is so he can develop a budget. In the same way that you have bills to pay for your household, this household of faith has bills we need to pay too. Your commitment helps us plan ministry for 2022.