

“Home Free -- Signed, Sealed, and Delivered”

November 3, 2019 ~ All Saints' Sunday

Rev. Beckie Sweet

Ephesians 1:11-23 *(The Message)*

11-12 It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone.

13-14 It's in Christ that you, once you heard the truth and believed it (this Message of your salvation), found yourselves home free—signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit. This signet from God is the first installment on what's coming, a reminder that we'll get everything God has planned for us, a praising and glorious life.

15-19 That's why, when I heard of the solid trust you have in the Master Jesus and your outpouring of love to all the followers of Jesus, I couldn't stop thanking God for you—every time I prayed, I'd think of you and give thanks. But I do more than thank. I ask—ask the God of our Master, Jesus Christ, the God of glory—to make you intelligent and discerning in knowing him personally, your eyes focused and clear, so that you can see exactly what it is he is calling you to do, grasp the immensity of this glorious way of life he has for his followers, oh, the utter extravagance of his work in us who trust him—endless energy, boundless strength!

20-23 All this energy issues from Christ: God raised him from death and set him on a throne in deep heaven, in charge of running the universe, everything from galaxies to governments, no name and no power exempt from his rule. And not just for the time being, but *forever*. He is in charge of it all, has the final word on everything. At the center of all this, Christ rules the church. The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence.

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I once heard a story about a small country church in rural England. This church had a late afternoon worship service where the tradition was that all who remained following the regular service would share the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. One Sunday the pastor of this church looked out on the congregation. There were so few people in attendance that he wondered if he should even bother with administering communion that evening. He decided to do it anyway and while reading the communion liturgy, he saw these words, “with your people on earth and all the company of heaven.” He paused for a moment, realizing that a much bigger crowd was attending worship than he thought. All the people of faith for nearly two millenia had come together for worship. The pastor apologized to God for not realizing the great company he was keeping. And he continued the communion service with a new awareness of the presence of all of the saints.

We have been using the word “saints” a lot this morning and you may be wondering what it means. This word is a translation of the Greek word “hagio” which means “holy ones.” Today, in particular, we are talking about the holy ones who have passed on to eternal glory this past year, who are in some way connected with this congregation.

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So how does one become a “holy one” or “saint?” Scripture is clear on this: God is holy. Holiness is a characteristic of God. We become holy by being in the presence of God. God’s holiness rubs off on us. But holiness is not just defined in terms of proximity to God. It also has the meaning of something being set aside for God’s use. So, as the paraphrase of our scripture text states, once one has heard and believed the message of salvation in Christ, we are home free -- signed, sealed, and delivered as “holy ones” ~ “saints” for all of eternity.

As Christians we believe that whenever we come to worship, we, too, are in the presence of God and are made holy, receiving faith in Jesus Christ and assurance of God’s blessing of eternal life. And so those who attend worship are saints who live forever and join with us whenever we come to worship. It is God who chooses those who will receive these blessings.

God has chosen all of you to be holy. Through the church and the worshiping saints who have surrounded you, God calls you, dedicates you for holy purposes, and gives you an inheritance of faith in Christ. Today, you have come into the presence of God. You are sealed with the Holy Spirit. You are holy ones. You have joined the ranks of saints. Church is a fellowship of saints who gather regularly to be in the presence of God, worshiping, and becoming increasingly holy.

So, All Saints’ Day is a time for rejoicing with all of the saints, the holy ones, who through the ages have faithfully served God in and through the church. This day reminds us that we are part of one continuing, living communion of saints. It is a time for expressing gratitude for all who build and preserve the church of Christ so that it can continue to be a space where God is powerfully present in worship. To rejoice with all the Saints of every generation expands our awareness of the great company of witnesses that surrounds us like a cloud. For, in faith, we pray to join the ranks of those who are home free -- signed, sealed, and delivered as the holy ones of God.