

## Written Copy: Revelation 7:13-17 “Whose Are These?”

All Saints Day Celebrated

Sunday, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023

### Text: Revelation 7:13-17

<sup>13</sup> Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” <sup>14</sup> I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones coming 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> They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. <sup>17</sup> For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

### The text’s intent

To show the promise of Christ to the Church Militant that even in the midst of all we must suffer through in this fallen broken world as we are tempted by our own sinful hearts and the devil working through the unbelieving world we are saved and protected by Jesus. We are sealed with the presence of the Holy Spirit who creates and sustains repentant baptismal faith that keeps us close to Him and marks us as property of the Triune God alone. We are protected from Satan who endeavors to claim us as His own but cannot since we belong to Jesus. Thus protected we serve as His means to call all those whom He has chosen to join our number on earth. Then John is shown the eternal result, the Church Triumphant in full array standing before our Lord and Savior. We are clothed completely righteous, the baptismal righteousness we were given on earth now perfected and made complete body and soul. And we praise and thank Christ who made it possible by our worship and our entire existence lived out in the New Heaven and New Earth. These are lives where we will never want anything again, and all sources of fear and tears are removed forever. And with the unending supply of the water of life we are assured that this Paradise will last forever, death is no more.

### Focus Statement:

Christ has stamped and sealed us as His own personal property, through the gift of the Spirit who creates repentant faith. He protects us throughout our life of temptation and affliction on this earth and from the devil who wants to claim us as his own. He washes us clean from the stain of sin and gives to us His robe of righteousness through the gift of repentant faith. He keeps us thus sealed so that we will stand before Him with the Church Triumphant and live in His uncloaked presence, made perfect and glorified by Him, to live in the restored Garden of Eden where there will be no more wants and no more tears. And it lasts forever with no chance to ever fall away.

### Function Statement:

#### Why it’s important to know:

As we live out our life, tempted and afflicted by our own sinful hearts, the world, and the work of the devil, we can lose sight and understanding of who we really belong to; not ourselves, but to Jesus.

#### What the hearer should do as a result:

Avail ourselves of the means of grace so that the Spirit can keep us sealed in faith unto life everlasting. And so that we can be His means now, as the Church Militant, to call all those He has chosen into the Church Triumphant.

### Subject Sentence: Property and protected by Triune God forever

## **Introduction: It's All a Matter of Identity**

Our Sermon Hymn poses an interesting question for All Saints Day: ***“With palms they stand. Who is this band, before the throne of light?”*** It's the same question that the Elder asks John in his vision in **Revelation 7:13** **One of the elders spoke to me and said, “These people dressed in white robes, who are they and where did they come from?” And I answered him, “Sir, you know.”** Do you know? Well, according to this Church holiday we are celebrating, and according to our Opening Hymn, these should be “the Saints”, right? ***“For all the saints, who from their labors rest.”*** Not the New Orleans Football Team, relaxing after playing on a Sunday. Who are these Saints? What does it mean to be a saint? And more importantly, are you one of them, especially seeing how at the beginning of this service you and I confessed before God and one another that we are sinners. Maybe an even better question is not who are we, but ***whose are we?***

In contemplating this I was reminded of the animated movie Toy Story #3. It's about the toys owned by a kid named Andy. In particular there is an action figure cowboy named Woody. And there is a Space Ranger named Buzz Lightyear. In Toy Story #3 Andy is grown up and heading off to college. He doesn't play with his toys much anymore. And with him moving out his mom wants him to clear out and get rid of all the stuff he no longer needs. His toys, which actually come to life when he is not around, are afraid that this means they will be thrown into the garbage and incinerated. So instead of allowing that to happen they escape and wind up at “Sunnyside Daycare”. It looks to be a perfect home for toys no longer wanted, especially as described by the toy in charge “Lotso”, a seemingly friendly stuffed teddy bear. He shows them around the room where they will be, and it seems to be peaceful, inviting, and fun. Andy's toys are especially excited because they are told by Lotso that they will be played with every single day. It's a toy's dream come true!

That dream is shattered when recess is over, and the kids all come back in. In the other room, where the older kids are, and where Lotso and the other toys that have been there all along are, it is a peaceful and fun place. But Andy's toys are in the pre-school room, and it's anything but peaceful. These kids throw, and bash, and pull apart their toys. It's a nightmare. When the day is over Andy's toys, battered and broken, petition to be moved out of that room. But they find Lotso won't allow that. Come to find out he is not the nice and caring leader they thought him to be. He tells them that the Pre-School Room is their lot in life from now on, and it's what they deserve since they no longer have an owner but have been cast off. Lotso is mean and unloving because he is a cast off toy and is still bitter about it.

But at the lowest and most hopeless point, Woody the Cowboy looks down at the bottom of his boot. And written on the bottom is the name “Andy”. Woody refuses to believe anything other than Andy is still their owner and wants something much better for them than this.

## **The Sealing of the 144,000**

**Revelation 7:3b-4 “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.” <sup>4</sup> And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:**

In this opening section of Chapter 7, Jesus is reminding us of whose we are with the vision of the 144,000. And who are these 144,000? As we learned last week, numbers in Revelation are symbolic and are not to be taken literal. These are all of the servants of God who have been sealed by His command upon their foreheads.

So, whose are they? To answer that we need to figure out what this seal is. In the Apostle John’s Day and before, kings would have a unique sign engraved upon a signet ring. This sign would be placed upon all that was their property, including his servants and slaves, marking them as belonging to him and him alone. Now in the case of a good king, this didn’t mean that you were just property to be used and abused by him. You were under his care and protection. It was a promise that you would never be in need but always have a home with him. Just like Andy’s toys always had a home with him.

Here we have the 144,000 who have been sealed with the sign that belongs only to the Triune God, the most loving and gracious King, the One and Only King over all. It marks them as His property, to be loved, protected, and cared for now and unto eternity. What is this identifying seal and mark? It is the presence of the Holy Spirit that is given in your baptism. In your baptism you were marked across the forehead and the heart with the cross to mark you as one redeemed by Christ. And placed upon your forehead through the water and the Word of Holy Baptism was the name of the Triune God, marking you as belonging only to Him.

These 144,000 symbolize what we call the Church Militant. These are all the believers in Christ alive on earth at any given time. It is the Church in the world at any given moment. It’s all those who have been called to faith by the Gospel, through Holy Baptism, and sealed in repentant saving faith. It is the Church gathered together as His body in Word and Sacrament Worship. Why is it so important that we are sealed by the Holy Spirit? Because there are those forces who would desire to tear us away from Christ and claim us as their own.

These forces work through the empowerment and encouragement of the sworn enemy of the Church: Satan. He hates that you are the property of Jesus. And he wants nothing more than to steal you away from Him. He wants you to forget who you belong to. He wants you to seek your identity in any other name or thing other than Jesus Christ. He works through our culture which encourages us to seek our identity in ourselves. The devil wants you to see yourself as a self-made man or woman. It's all part of the self-help movement that is flourishing today. It's even preached in place of the Gospel message on TV, and in congregations that call themselves Christian. Just declare yourself to be whatever you desire: I am beautiful, I am successful, I am happy, and the positive power of your positive words will make it so. Declare yourself a saint who is no longer troubled by sin and it will be so. The problem comes when you truthfully reflect upon your life and compare it to how God's law declares we all should live. When we look truthfully at how our lives stack up against God's law, we see we fail miserably in sainthood every day.

Then, at that point, the devil switches to tactic #2. He tells you that you are a failure. You're a sinner who could never be a saint. How could you ever expect God would want to claim you to begin with. Either way, the devil is there to put his mark of ownership on you. That mark is simply unbelief. It's when your identity and what you're trusting in is found in yourself, or in anything else in exclusion of, or even in addition to Jesus.

### **Your Identity: Property of the Triune God.**

So where should you find your identity? There is the old tried and true "***Saint and Sinner at the Same Time.***" And that is true. But since this a paradox it can leave us uncomfortable, especially when we are dealing with those times our life looks more like sinner than saint. We know that when we confess and ask forgiveness as the sinner we are, we are forgiven as the saint Christ declares us to be. But I've had people ask: "***What if I was to die before I asked forgiveness, especially for a serious troubling sin?***"

A better place to find your identity is remembering whose you are. You are one marked, sealed, and redeemed in Jesus Christ alone. You belong to Him, each day and every day, when you sin and when you obey. In your baptism you were given that white robe that is symbolic of the right standing that Jesus earned for you in His perfect life lived upon this earth. It is given to you, put on you by the Holy Spirit as the gift of faith. As we live out our lives on earth, suffering the temptations that come from the devil working in the world, as well as the desires of our sinful heart, not to mention those problems and tragedies that can make us question whose we are, we stain that white robe given at our baptism.

But as one who has been marked by faith in Christ your robe is continually washed clean. This happens not because you declare it to be so, but Jesus Christ declares it to be the truth. He declares that His blood, shed in your place upon the cross, washes away all your sin and removes it from your life. And His resurrection declares that by faith your robe is kept clean and white, no matter how much or how often you sin. Jesus is the only one that can declare this truth, and He declares it to you every Sunday.

How can you know for sure that this is true for you? Because of your baptism, where the Spirit placed the mark of ownership of the Triune God upon you. By your heartfelt confession of sin and the faith He gives to hold fast to the Words of Absolution as God's gift to you. Through the words of Gospel grace preached read and sung that you hold as God's Word to you in your life right now. And through the Sacrament of Holy Communion where Jesus Christ Himself comes to be really and truly present with you, to affirm you are His now and for eternity. Through these means He continues to put His seal upon you, even as the devil tries to make you forget it. But you've been called and claimed by One far stronger than the devil. He shed His precious blood for you and will not let you go. Even when your life looks more like sinner than saint, you stand as His precious beloved property, a member of His Church on earth, and the object of His grace, love, and forgiveness. That's who you are, a baptized child of Christ.

### **Sealed in Faith for the Eternity to Come**

God does all this work in you because He has something very special planned for you. In the second vision of Revelation Chapter 7 he gives us a symbolic glimpse of it. John sees a multitude that no one can count. These are all of those called and sealed in faith by the Holy Spirit; all who have ever lived and died in faith trusting God's promises of salvation throughout the history of humanity. It's the Last Day, and we are all being welcomed into eternal life.

**Revelation 7:9 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,**

You and I are there, standing before our Lord and Savior, the Lamb upon the throne. We are singing praises and waving Palm Branches, because this is the fulfillment of what Palm Sunday only pointed forward to. This is Christ the King, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, taking His rightful place as uncontested ruler of the universe, with all sources and causes of evil banished forever. We are standing shoulder to shoulder with all the saints of the past: those we know, and those we've never met, those that were our loved ones and those we only read about. This multitude is composed of all who died in faith: called, chosen, and sealed by the Holy Spirit for eternity.

We stand in perfect glorified bodies, these bodies that we have now, only raised from death to eternal life, and changed forever. Gone are all the imperfections, all the medical issues like diabetes, vision problems, and birth defects. Gone are all the aches and pains. Gone are the heart problems, cancer, COVID, and other diseases that mark our earthly existence. You will be better, stronger, faster, smarter, happier than you have ever been in this life. Gone is all that caused tears here in this world. Gone is death, forever.

And with us forever is Jesus: really and truly present. We will see Him in all His glory because we will be like Him in our perfect and holy bodies. And we will live with Him forever. That is what He has chosen you, called you, and sealed in faith for, so that you and I will live with Him in glory forever.

## **Conclusion**

In Toy Story #3 Woody looks down at the bottom of his cowboy boot and sees Andy's name, and he remembers what he is and who he belongs to. He is Andy's toy. Woody has Buzz Lightyear look at the bottom of his boot, and Buzz realizes the same thing. It is then that they begin their escape from Sunnyside and their adventure to get back home.

Look at the bottom of your shoe. You probably won't find a name written there, and that's okay. The name of the One who you belong to is not written on the bottom of your shoe, it's written across your forehead, meaning it's what you know to be true, and across your heart, meaning what you believe to be true. You have been chosen, called, and sealed in baptismal faith by the work of the Holy Spirit. And that work began in your baptism and continues on every day of your life. The Holy Spirit works through the good times, and especially during the hard times, the times of temptation and affliction, the times of sorrow and loss. Wherever you go, and whatever you do, you belong to the Triune God. He declares you to be His beloved, special property. And as such He will protect you and provide for you every day of your life on this earth, looking forward to eternal life with Him. Amen.