

Wiping Tears Revelation 7:9–17 All Saints' Day Nov. 1, 2020

They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

“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.

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;

the sun shall not strike them,

nor any scorching heat.

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.” Rev 7:14-17 Wiping tears

Brothers and sisters in Christ, they say that there are only two things you can be sure of, death and taxes. But that is not what we believe. I don't mean theologically, although that is true in a different way. I mean in our lives. We are sure school starts in late august and continues until may or early June, and we plan our trips around those dates. We are sure the seniors at school will have proms and graduations and celebrations and that we should plan to attend their graduation parties. We are sure Church services are held each Sunday. We are sure know when someone dies there will be a funeral and a meal and we should plan to attend. In fact we are so sure of it that many plan their text and hymns and even the menu for the dinner. We are sure that farmers are concerned about the weather, and even if it is good there is concern. There will be turkey and football at Thanksgiving. We are sure of these things, so sure that we train our kids for them, for what to expect. We teach them when to celebrate when to mourn, when to work and when to pray. There are smiles and there are tears, but we knew what to expect. The sun rises and the sun sets, and we order our lives.

Then 2020 came. And this year school ended in March. It is day to day as to whether it continues; and some have shut for two weeks this year. Seniors missed their proms and graduations were spotty and haphazard with few parties. While there was lots of time off for school, there were few trips. Church services were canceled or moved online - we could not meet together. Death still happens, even to people we do not expect , but funerals are small affairs, sometimes limited to 10. The meal following is iffy at best, we can't even visit half of our old friends and family. When there is an event we don't know whether to go and celebrate or stay home, and if we do go we don't know whether to celebrate or fear. We can barely shake hands or hug. We still wonder about the weather, but thanksgiving may be small and my daughter is thinking vegetarian and there is no telling what football is going to happen. Death may be certain, but funerals have changed and taxes were not due April 15. WE hardly know when to celebrate and when to mourn. WE have found we cannot order our lives.

Today is All Saints Day, and today we remember what we can really be sure of - theologically, certainly, but since God is in control, that means actually. This is what all those who believe in Christ, all who have washed their robes in the blood of the lamb, confess even up to death -

that God created a good world with no death, that sin entered the world and death lives with us, that God the son took on human flesh, that He died our death for us. That he rose again and sits at the right hand of God. All this God has accomplished. HE has told the saints of old and the saints now, that is us, this in His eternal word. It is certain. But there is more. We have been baptized into Christ and given his name, He lives in us. God did this -and it is an event that happened -it is certain and the promises given are believed. Because we are in Christ who rose, we do not die. Death is not the end but the entry to the throne of God, where the lamb in our midst is our shepherd. This is the faith that the saints confess, living and in glory. This is the certainty they and we have.

There are tears for what we lost this year - friends and times together, lives lived apart and even loss, but the God who created us, the God who redeemed us, is still faithful. He still wipes our tears, and shows us a life with no more mourning or tears.

This year God reminds us to trust no one but him. He even uses the saints of old, who have no earthly plans, to tell us that he has a heavenly plan for them and for us. That even now, when that tyrant death seems supreme, and we do all we can to avoid him, God tells us He has conquered death and made - so we mourn in hope -and celebrate in hope and God is in our mourning and our celebrating.

He promises not just the saints of old - Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The promise of life with our shepherd that has been from saints of old is for us as well.

So confess what is certain - confess your God who created and redeemed you with all the saints. And know that the God you trust lives for you - sustaining you with word and sacrament. The lamb is on his throne, the shepherd in our midst, feeding and sustaining us. He turns our mourning into celebration, he turns our eyes from our feet to him, and wipes every tear from our eyes.