

*The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him,
and he delivers them.*

⁸ *Taste and see that the LORD is good;
blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.*

⁹ *Fear the LORD, you his holy people,
for those who fear him lack nothing.*

¹⁰ *The lions may grow weak and hungry,
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.*

²² *The LORD will rescue his servants;
no one who takes refuge in him will be condemned. (Psalm 34:7-10, 22)*

All Saints are One

Today, we are observing the festival of All Saints. We are celebrating it in one of the best possible ways: in our late service today, we will baptize a baby. In my opinion, baptism could be the symbol of All Saints Day. You see, this church holiday is about the connection between this life and the next one. It's about the spiritual union between the church in heaven and the church on earth. We sometimes call the church on earth the church militant, the church at war, while the church in heaven can be called the church triumphant, the church victorious, or simply the church at rest. The church in heaven basks in the glory of Christ. They're before the throne of God and free from hunger and thirst and tears. But the church down here doesn't get to see the throne of God yet. In fact, it often feels like we live before the throne of Satan. The church down here has to work hard to keep away hunger and thirst and cold and sickness. The church down here knows all about tears. Nevertheless, in baptism, there are not churches; there is only one. In fact, because of all that God does in baptism, because of all that God will do for Elliana in her baptism this morning, all the differences between the church on earth and the church in heaven are erased. All Christians – or as we say it on this festival day – **all saints are one.**

I.

What do I mean by that? I don't mean that down here, we can all get together into one, big happy family. I wish we could. But the doctrinal divisions that exist are insurmountable in this life. But only in this life. When we all stand before Jesus, we will all confess the same faith, the same truth, the same Christ who has won eternal life for us. That will happen not because of anything that we do, but only because of what Jesus has done for us. So, **all saints are one in God's grace.**

Grace is God's undeserved love. It's an attitude in his heart that moves him to save us. But the Bible also applies that word *grace* to all the gifts God gives us. We don't deserve any of them, but God pours out blessings on us. Psalm 34, our sermon text for today, points to those blessings over and over again: **"The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them."** **"Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him."** **"Fear the LORD, you his holy people, for those who fear him lack nothing."**

But is all that really true? A Christian going to the oncology department for yet another course of chemo might think he or she lacks at least one thing: good health. A Christian sitting next to the casket of his wife or her husband might feel like God's protection failed. And let's be honest, we all know Christians who have suffered pain and sorrow. We know it's going to happen to us, sooner or later. So how can God say this?

These statements invite us to lift our eyes up from this life to the life to come. All the promises God makes find their most complete fulfillment in Christ. So, we will not be completely free from harm and danger until Jesus returns. We will not enjoy a physical life in which only good things happen until our bodies are transformed and made glorious like Jesus' body is today. We will not be able to taste and see that God is perfectly good until there is no sin around to contaminate the taste. But when we see Jesus all those promises will come true. All these promises point us to that day when there won't be a church at war any more. All of us saints will be at rest in Jesus.

But why is that true? The psalm says, “**Fear the Lord, you his holy people.**” Some Bibles translate this verse as “you his saints.” That’s why this verse is the psalm for the Festival of All Saints. We are now holy in God’s sight and the holy God protects and blesses his people. How did we get to be holy? I imagine that most of you feel like I do. There are times when I feel pretty good about myself. But there are many more times when I have to admit that I’m far from being a saint. And my sins have a way sneaking up on me when my mind is neutral – when I’m driving or mowing the lawn. They can hit me just when I’m going to bed, and then I have trouble getting to sleep. They can make me worry about the consequences. They can make me just feel bad because I am so much less than what God calls me to be as a spouse and a parent and a pastor and a Christian. Do you feel that way?

This psalm makes promises to saints. Does that mean we’re excluded? No. You know better. You and I are saints because of what Jesus did for us. Jesus was a true human being, just like we are, except that he had no sin. So all God’s laws applied to him. All God’s anger was poured out on him. God’s law and God’s punishment are for human beings and until a human being was perfect and until a human being paid, we were stuck in hell. So that’s what Jesus did. But Jesus wasn’t just paying for us. He was paying for all people everywhere, even those who refuse to believe. He was paying for all the church on earth and all the church in heaven. To do that, he had to be God himself. God took on the nature of man and was perfect for us. God joined himself to a human nature and died and paid for us. God as man rose and led us out of death and hell. God became man and saved us all. He made us saints.

Every promise that God makes to us depends on what Jesus did. You and I will enjoy that perfect peace of heaven because Jesus lived and died and rose again. God will keep that promise because he already kept the promise to send a Savior. And there’s more: God will even keep those promises in this life. So the Angel of the Lord does encamp around his people even here. Even here, we can taste and see that the Lord is good. Even here God’s saints lack no good thing. Now, that doesn’t mean everything will be perfect. We’re still live in a sinful world. But it does mean that God will determine when and how we have to suffer, and he will turn every pain and sorrow into blessings. It does mean that God will hear our prayers and in his own time and way, he will rescue us. It does mean that God will never allow more suffering to come than our faith can stand. And finally, when we stand with Jesus and all the rest of the saints of God and we look back over the lives God gave us here, we will see that God’s love never failed us. God did encamp around us all our lives and keep us safe. God really was good to us and we truly lacked nothing we needed. On that day, we will see all the things that God is doing for us right now that we cannot see today.

II.

So All Saints Day is about God’s grace. And we see that in holy baptism. God reaches down and plants his power in the word connected to the water and he washes away the sins of the person baptized, once and forever. So whether it’s a little baby like Elliana, who’s only a few days old and can’t really commit conscious sins yet, or it’s a full grown adult, lying on their death bed, being baptized after a lifetime of sin and rebellion, our baptisms give us all that Christ did for us. And they do more: they work faith in our hearts. God will give little Elliana faith in Jesus. Her parents have a lifelong responsibility to feed that faith. But it is hers today. That makes her just like every other member of Christ’s church. **All saints are one in Christian faith.**

Faith is no more or less than trusting in the promises God gives us. The very last verse of Psalm 34 points to the greatest of all God’s promises. It says, “**The LORD will rescue his servants; no one who takes refuge in him will be condemned.**” What’s another word for rescue? Save. We Christians like to say that Jesus saved us. What does that mean? It means he rescued us from death and hell. But why did we need that? Obviously, because we’re sinners. Death and hell are God’s punishment for sin. On Judgment Day, the whole world will appear before Jesus to be judged. And even before that, at the moment that we die, we will stand before Christ to be judged. All those saints in heaven have already passed through that first private judgment. And all of us Christians who are still living down here have God’s promise that we have nothing to fear in that judgement. No one who takes refuge in Christ will be condemned. Instead, we will be saved. We will be rescued from hell, the ultimate consequence of sin. We will be rescued from death itself. These bodies will rise and live forever. That’s a pretty big promise!

All the rest of God’s promises flow from it. They’re all true because that one great promise is true. King David said it this way: “**The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.**” Lions were the biggest predators the children of Israel encountered. They ruled the food chain.

Sadly, they're endangered today, but even now, I wouldn't want to run into one alone in the Serengeti. But even back then, a lion could grow weak and hungry. When drought strikes, a lion's prey can run out. It takes a lot of meat to keep those big, powerful bodies going. Without it, they began to lose their strength. What a sad sight it must be to come across a lion that's starving and so weak that it can't threaten anyone. Do you see God's point? Even the most powerful person here can lose at life. Just this year, presidents and prime ministers have gotten COVID. No matter how wealthy or powerful you are, disease or accident or violence or old age is going to get you some day. But those who seek the Lord lack no good thing. God takes care of us, even here. That's his promise.

Now, what is a good thing? We might be tempted to think that God is promising us that we'll always have a nice house and a new car and fashionable clothes and whatever else we think is necessary to maintain our quality of life. But that's not the point here. Hopefully, I don't have to prove to you that having money and stuff can be a curse if that's all you care about. In just a few weeks, Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* will be on TV over and over again. Watch it, if you don't understand that point. The most important thing in our lives is getting to heaven. Good things are those things that help get us there. Good things are blessings that God sends to care for our faith and to show his love for us. Now, because God does love us, we get many more good things than just the bare necessities of life. He richly and daily blesses us, even here. But something in this life will kill every one of us, if Jesus doesn't come back first. God isn't going to stop that. He is going to send death when it's time for us to go home.

So in Christ, God promises to watch over and care for and provide for every one of his saints. He will do it in the way that is best for our faith, best to get us home to heaven. That means we might not always understand what he's doing. We might not always like it. But when we stand with all saints in heaven, we will see that just how richly God kept that promise.

Faith trusts that promise, too, even when we can't see what God is doing. Faith trusts in the love of Jesus who died and rose for us. Faith trusts in the love of God the Father who sent his Son to save us. Faith trusts in the love of the Holy Spirit who works through the gospel and who gave us our faith. And he did that for every one of us in our baptisms. Baptism makes us part of All Saints. It will do that for Elliana today. It did that already for every saint in heaven. It did that for you and for me. We are now one with Jesus, one with all the saints in heaven and on earth. Celebrate that gift. Amen.