



All Saints Sunday

Sunday, November 5

9:00am + 11:00am

*Out of the Great
Ordeal... Together*

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“Out of the Great Ordeal... Together”

Charlie Berthoud | Revelation 7:9-17

Today is All Saints Sunday, when we remember loved ones who have died. We light candles. We sing “For all the saints.” For Bible readings, one of the suggested lectionary lessons comes from the book of Revelation. I almost wish we could hear these words without “from the book of Revelation” attached to them, as we have a lot of cultural baggage with Revelation. Hollywood and certain extremes of the Christian church have cherry-picked verses for the sake of drama and thus not helped us to understand either this book in its historical context or what God is saying to us through these words.

The book of Revelation was written not to scare people but to comfort people in this time of persecution. The early Christian church faced horrific persecution, because they were a threat to the Empire. Christians were jailed, tortured, and killed regularly. In that context, the words from Revelation are good news.

In today’s reading, from this context of persecution and despair, we hear good news in various ways:

- **SALVATION:** In some way shape or form, salvation is coming—salvation from the sadness of the current situation.
- **A MULTITUDE:** In this heavenly scene, there is a great multitude of people, more than anyone could count.
- **ALL PEOPLE:** The multitude comes from every nation, every tribe, every language. All people seem to be included.
- **LIFE:** There will be no more hunger, no more scorching heat, no more tears; instead the Lamb will guide everyone to springs of the water of life.
- **JOURNEY/HOPE** The book of Revelation was written for those who have come through (and those who are going through) “the great ordeal” to give comfort and hope to suffering people.

Listen for God's word on this All Saints Day:

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying,

'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!'

And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, singing,

'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen.'

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, 'Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?' I said to him, 'Sir, you are the one that knows.' Then he said to me, 'These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

For this reason they are before the throne of God,
and worship him day and night within his temple,
and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.
They will hunger no more, and thirst no more;
the sun will not strike them,
nor any scorching heat;
for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of the water of life,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.' (Revelation 7:9-17)

Thanks be to God for the words of Scripture.

While the vast majority of us, as far as I know, have not suffered from torture or starvation or other such ordeals that the early Christians did, we do deal with the ordeal of grief.

On All Saints Sunday, we acknowledge the very real presence of grief in our lives, the ordeal of sadness and suffering, as we remember loved ones who have died.

We read names of people who died within the past year, but I'm pretty sure all of us are remembering people who died a few years or many years ago as well.

Grief takes time, lots of time.

In our frenetic and impatient world, we rarely take time to grieve, and we rarely give others space to grieve.

The book of Psalms helps us grieve, with almost half of the psalms including some sort of lament theme.

We value this day, this All Saints Day, to remember our loved ones and to give us space to grieve, to cry, to lament.

Poet Donna Ashworth has a well-loved poem reminding us that grief is not a one and done thing, it's not something you can deal with and check off your list. She writes:

YOU DON'T JUST LOSE SOMEONE ONCE

You lose them over and over,
sometimes in the same day.

When the loss, momentarily forgotten,
creeps up,
and attacks you from behind.

Fresh waves of grief as the realisation hits home,
they are gone.

Again.

Losing someone is a journey,
not a one-off.

There is no end to the loss,
there is only a learned skill on how to stay afloat,
when it washes over.

Be kind to those who are sailing this stormy sea,
they have a journey ahead of them...

<https://donnaashworth.com/2021/09/16/you-dont-just-lose-someone-once/>

Our Associate Pastor Megan Berry posted this poem in its entirety on her Facebook page.

Grief is a journey. We don't want to wallow in our, but at the same time, we can't ignore it. Generally, it gets better with time, but it never really goes away.

So, we come together and light candles, trusting that somehow and someday God will lead us through the great ordeal. In order to get through, we remind ourselves again and again of the promises of God:

- We take comfort in the promise of the gospel, that Jesus is the resurrection and the life.
- We take comfort in the promise of scripture that nothing—not life nor death nor anything else in all creation—can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.
- We take comfort in Jesus' words of blessing those who mourn, that they will be comforted.

We hear these promises as we join fellow pilgrims on the journey.

As we reflect on life and death and the journey of faith, I want to tell you about a 15 year-old boy named Sam Crowe and his high school friends, and Sam's grandmother, Peggy Winckowski.

At Sam's St Louis high school, every Wednesday is a later start, so a while ago, they started going to a diner for breakfast.

One day Sam got an idea. He told them about his grandmother who makes good breakfasts, better than the diner.



So—after checking with her!—they went to Grandma's house for breakfast the following Wednesday, and a weekly tradition was born: every Wednesday several hungry boys enjoyed a hearty meal at Grandma Winckowski's house.

But in July of 2022, 15-year-old Sam was tragically killed in a car accident.

As friends and family dealt with the shock and the heartbreak, several friends went to Grandma's house to make sure she was ok. While they were caring for her, she was worried about them.

As school began in the fall of 2022, Peggy reached out to Sam's friends and

encouraged them to come back for breakfast on Wednesdays. So they came. And they brought their friends.



And now it's not uncommon for 20 or 30 kids to show up for breakfast on Wednesdays.

Families of the kids and local businesses have donated food to feed the hungry crowd, which somehow fits inside the small house, where Peggy also cares for her husband who has dementia and Parkinson's disease.

Grandma Winckowski says "It's just a tiny house, but it's got a lot of love in the walls."



She makes pancakes, eggs, bacon, waffles and more. A local bakery sometimes donates donuts.

Coming together regularly allows them time and space to grieve the death of their friend.

“It feels like he’s there with us,” said one friend. “It’s something he enjoyed doing, and we’re doing it for him so that we can continue his memory.”

Another friend noted: “For everyone who had the opportunity to know him and needs somewhere to grieve, it’s a great place.”

Sometimes the kids just stop by Peggy’s house during the week to say hello. One photo in the Washington Post story on this shows them gathering around a fire on a Saturday night—kind of like us gathering around the candles here in the sanctuary.



Grandma Winckowski wisely notes: “We’ll never get over Sam’s passing, but we can get through it together.”

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2023/11/01/sam-crowe-friends-breakfast-grandma/>

We don’t have bacon, eggs, or pancakes here today, but we do have donuts down the hall, and we’ve got bread and juice right here, to nourish us and to remind us that nothing, neither life nor death nor anything else in all creation can separate us from God’s love.

Let us pray....