

For All the Saints
Revelation 7:9-17

As someone who is facing a lot of life transitions I will tell you that it is hard to have your head in two places at once. Selling a house is hard to do as you are also simultaneously buying a house. There are things to do in two towns, two churches, two buildings. You guys know this problem all too well. You need to balance work and home. You've got a big meeting but the kids are sick. You've got a big project that's due but your kid has a soccer game. You're sitting in worship but you are waiting to hear back on the results of your recent health screening. We get pulled into many different directions. Our minds need to be many places at any given time. Our heads are often in two places at once.

Today is All Saints' Day. If you are new to the church or you just don't know what that's all about, let me tell you. All Saints' Day is one of my favorite days of the church year. This is one of our biggest celebrations of the year because it forces us to put our heads in two places at once. The first place is somewhat obvious and often outshines the other. The first place our head is on All Saints' Day is up. You'll see that in our reading from Revelation. We see this glorious and diverse throne room. We see the grandness of God's story. We see a great multitude, so many people gathered that you can't even begin to count. Saints dressed in white, coming from every corner of the earth, speaking every language, praising one God. They surround the throne of God, waving palm branches and singing a song of salvation. "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne" like a chorus reverberating throughout the halls of heaven. And in the midst of it all, the Lamb of God, marked with the scars he saved the world, sits in the center worthy of every eye, every word of worship. It's an incredible scene. It's an amazing scene and if you truly picture it you realize how amazing God is. If you really take it in you can see the vast story of salvation, stretching across time and space that includes more than just the people you know or are familiar with.

More than just your fellow citizens are there. There are martyrs from the underground church in China gathered in worship. There are middle easterners standing there who told the story of salvation to their children, passed down through generations. There are Europeans who preserved and spread the gospel of Jesus through print, dressed in white around the throne. There are Russians singing with hands raised, seeing with their eyes the things they could only keep in their hearts behind the iron curtain of their communist government. There are Norwegians and Ethiopians and Brazilians and Hondurans and Sudanese. Believers of all shapes and sizes and colors and tribes and languages all gathered there to worship Jesus. Their faith validated by what they see. Their hopes turned in a tangible, present reality. It's an amazing amazing thing and we celebrate that today. That's the vision of All Saints' Day.

Our heads are in the clouds as we see all that All Saints' Day shows itself to be. We stop and celebrate those saints today. We stop to celebrate and remember the saints who have gone before us. We take great comfort in the grand story of salvation that brings in all people by the blood of the Lamb. But then, as we scan that magnificent throne room, we see saints that are more familiar to us. We see our grandmother there who insisted that we be baptized. We see our grandpa there who always had a Werther's candy for you in the church pew. We see our teachers and professors who taught us to integrate Jesus into every academic discipline we study. We see our friends who prayed with and for us through our most difficult moments. We see our siblings who kept us tethered to the church when we felt like straying. We see children we lost too soon through disease, accidents or miscarriage gathered in the loving arms of Jesus until we can hold them again, or maybe for the first time. We see our spouses who showed us Jesus' love by the way they loved us. We see all these familiar faces, these saints of God who are now with Jesus. We wish they were still with us but we know they are in an incredible place. Today is a day to remember them. Today is a day to celebrate those who have gone before us, those we don't know but especially those who we've mourned in this life, who have died in the faith and are now at rest with Jesus. This scene of heaven is big and amazing and overwhelming and joyful.

But it's far away. It feels really far away. Eternity seems forever away from our world today. This heavenly throne room seems far from us, especially when we deal with our world today. Death feels like a distance further than six feet in the ground. Suffering makes you feel like you are miles from God. Depression makes you feel like you are isolated and separated from anyone who would care about you or me. So, this throne room is incredible. This eternal moment seems amazing but it sort of feels unattainable. It feels so far away that it'll never come. I've got bills piling up. I've got one health problem after another. I've got a trail behind me paved with broken relationships. These things need to be dealt with now. They need to be handled now. I can think about that eternal stuff later. I'll enjoy it when I get there. We long for what this eternal vision, hope and promise brings but it's like we just can't visualize it for ourselves. How can our heads be in that heavenly throne room, fixated on the Lamb and the choir of saints when we keep getting dragged back down to earth.

For all the saints who from their labors rest, who thee by faith before the world confessed. We sing this song because these are our heroes. These are our heroes but they don't want the attention. Our heads are drawn up, our eyes staring at them but they point us elsewhere. They seem so far away but they direct our attention to one who is closer. The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He is the one who transcends time and space to connect us to the saints who have gone before us. He is the connecting point that links heaven and earth. He is our temple that brings God to us and sweeps us up to heaven. His wounds are the receipt for the price he paid on the cross for our sin. Though he reigns victorious from the throne he bears the proof of purchase in his hands and side. This Lamb makes us saints. This Lamb draws us to himself. This Lamb takes our soiled rags and exchanges them for white robes. This is the gospel story that changes the whole world. This is the story of salvation that compels all the saints to sing his praises. And as the throng of saints sing this sacred song, our Lamb Jesus looks down at us gathered here in worship and gently says that this day is for us as well.

That's the incredibly joyful truth about this day for us. When we sing "For All the Saints" we are part of that song! O blest communion fellowship divine! We feebly struggle, they in glory shine; yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine! You and me, we are God's saints on earth. We are the ones bringing glory to the Lamb on earth. We are the ones washed in His blood on earth. Yes, the story of God is grand. The glory of that throne room is unmatched. But look at what we do here. We encircle this altar. We taste his body and blood. We sing his praises. We are just a shadow of what eternity will look like but we are included in all the saints. We don't have to have our heads just in the clouds. We live in this world now, longing for the next, knowing that the eternal Jesus is also our real and present Jesus. All of God's glory through time and space, covering all saints for all time, is celebrated here for us and through us. It's an incredible thing. It's an amazing thing. It's a comforting thing knowing that we are included, not just an after thought or a "not yet" in the eternal story of God's amazing grace. We are the saints of God. This vision of eternal belonging, unending mercy, unconditional love. That is all for us, his saints, his beloved children. We have it now and we will one day stand shoulder to shoulder with all the saints for all time, centered on the Lamb of God.

So, allow yourself to have your head in two spaces. Recognize that God is present and active in both. He is worthy of praise and honor in both. He is forgiving and holding you now, not just in eternity. He is not just in the far and distant land, out of reach and out of mind. He is here and now. He is among us, his saints on earth. You are His saints, even if you don't always act like it. Picture this place and what we do here as just a small glimpse, a faint example of what eternity will be. Rejoice in your sainthood and recognize it is encouraged and strengthened as you come to this place. Let it make you long for this place just like you long for eternity. We gather with the saints here, celebrating what is to come. It is for all the saints. Not just the holy ones that have already gone before us. It is for us. Earned by the blood of the Lamb. Happy All Saints' Day. It is your day because of the focus of our worship, Jesus Christ. Amen.