

October 29 2017

**Reading from the Bible** Hebrews 12:1-3  
Revelation 7:9-17

**Sermon** “There’s Room for You at the River”

The Scripture gives a beautiful picture. It is easy for us to say that it speaks to us about something that is down the road and it is not for now. However, we need this scripture desperately now in our chaotic and dangerous world just as much as the people did who read about visions that St. John wrote. Those people were in the midst of uncertain times of chaos and persecution and they needed to see the bigger picture and so do we. They needed to see the celebration of faith and the hope of the promise that Christ has fulfilled. If you look at the cover of the church bulletin, it says. “Christ has turned all our sunsets into dawns.” And in another place in chapter 21 of the Book of Revelation at the very end, it says “God will be with you and will wipe away every tear from your eyes.” In the morning time the king will be there. Don’t we all wish that? And it is true because this is the future that Christ talks about. It echoes the end story and it echoes the best of the story. Revelation seven mentions the people were in the midst of terrible times but praising God. The people had the stamp of approval and feel they are protected. The verb that is being used here is praising. The people in heaven are praising God. They are praising God just as St John was looking at them in his vision. He wrote it about 90 AD. And the people continued to praise God without ceasing forever. Would we have that feeling, too, if we could see into heaven? And the people who passed away added to the praising. While there is judgment in God’s plan there is this picture of God’s people in heaven. God wants to show us a picture of what is going on in Heaven while we are here on earth. God wants you to know that no matter what you are going through here on earth there is hope in the future. As we long for our heavenly home we are reminded that Jesus the Good Shepherd is there to take us home.

So what is the communion of saints? It is in the Apostles Creed and we say it often in the Communion Service. It is an amazing mystery and we really can’t define it. How is it that as we worship right here now our spirits are joined with every other person that loves the Lord around the world? It is awesome! We can’t feel alone at that point and neither can they no matter what they are going through. We have mystic communion with those who have gone on as well. We know many by name and many we don’t know by name and they all love the Lord. We can see the power and the energy in that.

I want to give you an illustration that happened when I was on vacation. We were on the train from Durango to Silverton and the folks were telling us about

aspen trees. I love aspen trees. I didn't realize there are many kinds of aspen and not all of them are quaking aspen. The quaking aspen have leaves that look like golden dollars and move in the wind. Aspen trees are very unique; there are boy aspen and girl aspen. I didn't know that. You often see aspen in a grove but you hardly ever see a single tree. The single ones have been planted by the seed. That is one way that they are reproduced, and the other way is by cloning the roots. If you see a bunch of aspens together their roots are all united. They all draw together from the same nutrient. They grow in many places where they wouldn't survive if they were single trees. They are the first ones to grow after a fire. It is very difficult to kill aspen. They are like certain weedy plants that the weed people don't like. They are older than the massive Sequoias or the Biblical Bristlecone trees. In Utah there are aspen that are older than 80,000 years. They are very difficult to prune because of their root system and the rapid rate that they reproduce. They also grow all the time even if they lose their leaves. They continue to grow in the winter. Under thin outer bark, there is a layer that allows the tree to create sugars and grow when other deciduous trees do not grow and are dormant. They are also food and home for a variety of critters. They regenerate, they replicate themselves, they are aggressive and they are resistant to disease. And doesn't that sound like the church-the communion of the saints.

The church living right now and is on the move sharing the Gospel and the church eternal in heaven. When an aspen dies the roots stimulate new growth so under stress they grow, Don't you love that picture? I will never look at the aspen tree the same way again. That is what we are meant to be, the communion of saints, we are here for a holy purpose. We are Christians, baptized, and confessing Christ as Lord. Most of us are smaller in faith but there are some in big letters in Faith and they are our examples. Some of you know some of them and we all have them in our lives. There are saints that are venerated and set aside by the Catholic Church but as Hebrews says we are all surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. Those are the faithful ones and they are cheering us on. There is an enduring bond between the faithful on earth and the faithful who have gone before. We are not outside in that faith, we are in that fellowship. We are to pray for one another, help one another, and serve one another. We are to grow more saints and we are to extend those roots out, and burst out with new life. We are to demonstrate the communion of saints in our worship and celebration with people, encourage one another, be strong and be connected. The world today is about me and Jesus but the communion of saint's counter that and reminds us about me and Jesus, our crucified risen Lord and one another. We are united with Christ because he said. "Abide in me and I will abide in you." So we have that crown of faith; we have that group of people praying for us.

When I have been with people that are dying I have known that mighty crowd of saints were there in that room. John Muir, the naturalist said we look at life at the back side of the tapestry. What we normally see is the loose ends and tangled threads, and the frayed cords and occasionally the light shines through the tapestry and we get a glimpse of the larger design. Revelation opens that tapestry open and we see a glimpse of what is to come. Christ's opens it a little here, and we can look at one another in this room-- you are the gathering of the saints.

Let us pray.

Gracious God we give you thanks, that you trust us, you call us, and you choose us and you made us saints. If we don't feel worthy, you show us our potentials, you the possibilities, you know our connectedness, our fellowship, our love for one another and you help us to overcome any obstacles. May we truly be the communion of saints to one another here so that others will see and be drawn to join our grove of aspen shining in the sun. Amen.