

SUMMARY: ALL SAINTS DAY

Rev. 7:9-17

We need our heroes. We loooooong for our heroes. It's as if we have this void... And there is certainly no shortage of candidates to fill that void: *Celebrities who are marketed by their publicists to be our heroes: movie stars/ entertainers/ Sportsmen and women... Political figures who at their best work hard to improve our lives...*

We all have them – so who are yours? Environmentalists perhaps: David Attenborough, David Suzuki? Jane Goodall, Diane Fosey? Health professionals: Bonnie Henry? How about the intellectual giants that we follow, the activists: Malala Yousafzai?

Today is ALL SAINTS DAY! It's all about our spiritual heroes: It's about our remembering those people whose lives move and inspire us both by who they are and what they do! We remember to honour them and to learn from them!

And so who are your spiritual heroes? Do you have them? I think the most real heroes often go unnoticed, unacknowledged... But God sees them! ...and in our reading today St John gets to see these people as God sees them! He shares a beautiful and deeply poetic apocalyptic image with us.

This, then, is a revelation of how God sees those whose lives actually are all about their worship of God! It's those whose actual living is the worship that makes God smile – whether they are intentionally aware of it or not! - these are people who have God & the ways of God as the ultimate truth and whole point of their lives! **Folks, in this text John is offering us a snapshot of us at our best! I wonder how aware all of those in John's vision actually are of their 'saintly' status.**

When he was asked about who exactly they are John confessed in vs 14 that he had no idea: **"Sir, you alone are the one that knows"** was his reply! John doesn't even pretend to be in charge of deciding who gets to be 'IN' with God – and neither should we. He is just SO correct as he implies how discerning this is God's business!

But then John is told who they are! Using words hugely charged with imagery that has been so awfully abused by overly conservative fundamentalists over the years, 'the elder' of John's vision explains how: ***'standing before the throne and before the Lamb, these are those robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.*** The elder goes on to say that...***they, having washed their robes have made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*** I think of Isaiah, who writes in 1:16-18 of how ***"Though our sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.***

And so THAT'S who they are! But as I've said, those powerfully evocative words have been used to justify some of the harshest understandings of atonement theology, and I'm not going there. Instead, where I am going is how we get an idea of who they are as we look at what their wearing of white robes signify – robes as the biblical symbol of identity, and whiteness symbolizing our most God-given purity. These, then, are those who have reclaimed their identities as having been made in God's image!

And that's what our salvation in Christ seals! The point being that having been created in God's image – something so easily forgotten - we genuinely believe that we, with all of creation, have been Christ restored: ...our '*salvation*' meaning that it is now possible for us to be made re-aware of just who we actually are and always have been! ...and then to live that reality. **Our living into that reality is the worship that God expects from us – God's Saints!** That reading from Isaiah goes on: *And so, we are to: ¹⁶ Wash and make ourselves clean. Take our evil deeds out of God's sight; stop doing wrong. ¹⁷ Learn instead to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.*

That's what 'saved' empowered Godly worship actually looks like. And so, that's what those Christ-redeemed, Spirit-touched, God-honouring goodness-workers of John's revelation are always all about! They the real heroes, as opposed to whatever zeitgeistⁱ our age would conjure up. **Who are these people in your life? Who are the SAINTS that you would honour today?** We see in them reflecting God's character but by their many and varied acts of loving kindness.

But notice too how we are specifically told of how MANY there were: – that they were: *...a great multitude that no one could count, a people from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages.* That tells us something about how expansive and diverse and inclusive God's vision is as God looks out at God's most precious people – reflecting God's glory in the world! That it includes SO many more than we could ever imagine! AND INCLUDES US! There is a very real sense in which today's text is so much more about ourselves than it is about pointing to others. What I'm suggesting is that this vision of real-time worshippers represents OUR embracing of OUR place within that worshipping number.

We've spoken before about what we believe the worship that God requires of us is all about. Our *best* worship is about how we are living our lives HERE, NOW! *We see that in the Sinai giving of the 10 very practical Commandments!* We live our best worship in the very practical way in which we demonstrate God's character and intentions for the world - today!

THIS IS THE HEROISM OUR WORLD MOST NEEDS FROM US TODAY! This is what white robe wearing, palm frond waving worship BEST looks like today on earth as it is in heaven! This is what Christ's coming and teaching and dying and rising is all about! That's what our real salvation in him is & what it does: It's about our being empowered away from all that keeps us small and trapped in our self-preserving, ego-obsessed, small selves and restored back to knowing and being the God-demonstrating blessing we were made to be!

THESE THINGS WE KNOW: Salvation is always God's work! In Christ, it's always for us! And by the Spirit not only is it for us to own, but most importantly, it's for us to LIVE! May it be so! ...and may all our LIVING be the worship that brings God glory!

Rev Robin Jacobson

ⁱ Defined by Google as 'the defining spirit or mood of a particular period of history as shown by the ideas and beliefs of the time.'