



Pastor Ken Nelson's Sermon

SERMON – ALL SAINTS

REVELATION 7:9-17

NOVEMBER 7, 2021

“YOU ARE WHAT YOU WEAR”

In C. S. Lewis's famous allegory “The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe”, the adventure of finding Narnia - that is, the Kingdom of God, begins in a old British manor house in an empty room that contains nothing but a wardrobe – a clothes closet. Looking inside, a young, impetuous girl named Lucy saw several coats, mostly long fur ones – classy stuff. There was nothing little Lucy liked so much as the feel of fur. She stepped into the wardrobe and got in among the coats and rubbed her face against them.

Soon she found a second row of coats, combinations of mink and wool, colors galore, and kept walking, step by cautious, but excited step. "This must be an enormous wardrobe!" she thought. Then she noticed that there was something crunching under her feet and she was rubbing her face, not against coats, but against evergreen tree limbs. In a moment, a twinkling of an eye, she was standing in the middle of a wood at night with snow under her feet and snowflakes falling through the air until she came to a lamppost.

Lucy was in Narnia, just on the other side of the wardrobe. Lewis is of course saying that just beyond this world, this reality, is another-an eternal world, an eternal reality. It is close to us, or we to it, so its presence and its undertakings we can experience at least to a certain degree in this life. But final and full participation is a final and full “passageway” away. Lewis drew his story from many biblical sources, but of this world that is both here and far off, both now and not yet, he borrowed from the great allegory which conveys the truth of that which is now and not yet – the book of Revelation.

The author of this story, the Apostle John, was writing to a struggling church whose beleaguered or complacent believers were simply trying to hold their ground. Against that reality, he writes of a life absent even the faintest hint of what we would call suffering. Two churches are in view to John, the church on earth, which struggles yet remains faithful to Jesus and the church in heaven, which worships constantly in the presence of Jesus.

Two worlds side-by-side. That which we live in where sin and death mingle with every day pleasures and periods of happiness, and that still to come, a full throated worship of Christ - “a great multitude which no one could number, from every tribe and every nation, every people and every tongue, clothed in white robes and praising God... saying Salvation belongs to our God and to the Lamb. Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”

And once in a while the song of those “clothed in white” drifts through to encourage we who have not had our final fitting to press on – the fight is worth it, every tear, gray hair and disappointment worth it. They sing to us, whose days are often if not always changing, of things that never change.

As I Corinthians 16:13 says, they sing to us “to hold on, stand firm in the faith, live boldly, and let all you do be done in love.” Who are these saints, clothed in white? Well, of the first order they are the baptized, washed in water the color of crimson, believers in a man who called not the righteous but sinners into his kingdom. Therefore, they were clothed in Jesus even though doused in sin and will rise to wear robes as dazzling as his, the day he ascended into heaven.

But they are also those making their way through the wardrobe, the fitting room - folks who pastor and author Peter Marshall once referred to as "saints of the rank and file." They accept without self-pity things they cannot change. They are stricken with the common and extraordinary hardships of this world but not defeated by them.

They endure the death of parents, spouses, their kids and grandkids, they fret over a world of violence that seem so bewildering and unnecessary, listen as leaders wrangle over which "ism" is best, capital, Marx, libertarian or social, all of which create their own sets of winners and losers, but know that real life is lived in the mundane of finding a job, keeping it, putting up with it, and making ends meet somehow by way of it. Sometimes they make dramatic and courageous mid-life corrections with family and career, even as they grieve the loss of that mundane that once seemed so ordinary but in a twinkling of an eye seems now so comforting.

They teach kids the faith and pray they remain in it – and they keep up their prayers, even intensify them, if and when they don't. They worship the Lord Jesus even if they don't understand his ways and admit to a few occasions when they were tempted to think another route might work better. They display true humility, which Martin Luther once said is when a person "doesn't even know they are being humble." They wink at a good story, even if it might be a tad off color, for the sake of the teller as much as the enjoyment of the hearer. But above all, they are the ones who despite trials and triumphs in life are quick to deflect it all and make the simple confession that despite not knowing all there is to know about the bible, or the church, much less this world, "Jesus is my life" and that's that!

These saints strike an uncanny resemblance to men and women like Ruth Steffins, Diane Schmelzer, Diane Foley, Annie Bermel, Jeanette Ketelsen, Lowell Sonderman, Carl Hirth, Bill Jordan, Russ Basel, and Marge Skarie, and others not of this flock we remember tonight, who each in their own way "pressed on toward the prize of the call of Christ heavenward." The Saints are ones who have an ear for Jesus, a heart inclined toward their neighbors need because of Him, and whether in this life they much cared about what they wore, now, if Revelation is to be our guide, wear that classic, timeless white. The same worn by the way, by younger ones named Trinity, Nora and Elena, who were washed in the blood of the lamb this past year and whose sins, though scarlet, became white as snow.

They say, "you are what you wear." Our saints are who they wear – folks who trust a carpenter's son to fit them for heaven. AMEN