

Are You Going?

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1 John 5:9-13
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(The scripture passage this morning is taken from the first letter of John, the apostle and the author of the Gospel of John and Revelation.)

One of the greatest joys of my ministry over the past thirty years has been the privilege of visiting the older saints of the church who could no longer attend worship. Almost all have been a delight to visit. They share stories with me of how God has been active in their lives and about how God provided for them over the years. We pray together for current concerns and needs. I read favorite scriptures passages and we always pray. It is surprising to me how often the person I am visiting wants to pray for me as well! The visits are always a blessing to both of us.

On Thursday, I got a call from a man who wanted to tell me that his 93-year-old mother was on hospice care. Whenever I visited his mother he was always there too. The three of us had enjoyed many conversations about theology, and church history, and the Scriptures and Jesus' Second coming. He wanted me to know that his mother was dying. He and his sisters all knew for certain that their mother had faith in Jesus Christ. What a comfort it was for them to know that yesterday morning when Jean passed away, she went on to heaven and is now with all the other saints, worshipping Jesus in person.

Thursday evening shortly after I got off the phone with Jean's son I received a text message from Terri that her friend's mother was not doing well either. She had had a stroke, so I asked Terri if she was a believer, and Terri replied yes. Terri and I agreed that although we know that her friend's mother, and my friend Jean, will have eternal life with Jesus, does not lessen our pain at all, but it does give us hope to know they will be healthy and whole, worshipping Jesus with all the saints, and that we will see them again someday.

There is something about standing in a room by your mother's hospital bed watching her slowly drift away, that stirs up all sorts of questions about life after death. What do people do who do not have the hope or assurance of eternal life?

Occasions like "All Saints Day," when we remember and honor those who have died in the past year, also bring to mind thoughts about heaven and eternal life. What happens when we die? Where *IS* heaven? Is it a place? What do we have to do to be good enough to go to heaven? Is it possible to be *certain* that you will go to heaven when you die?

A few weeks ago, after one of the John Guest lectures on the Lord's Prayer, a woman wanted to talk with me. She and her late husband were members of another denomination. She was very distraught because her husband had died in the past year. She had lots of questions about faith and guilt, about being good enough to be allowed into heaven, questions about death and eternal life. The best comfort available for anyone who asks those questions is to read the Bible, both what Jesus said, as well as what eyewitnesses wrote. God's Truth applies to us today just as it did 2,000 years ago.

Jesus said to Martha, sister of Lazarus who had just died, *"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."*¹

In speaking about God's people, Jesus said, *"I am the Good Shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. ... My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand."*²

On the night before he was crucified Jesus said to his disciples, *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."* Thomas said to him, *"Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"*

Jesus answered, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ... Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."*³

In one of the most well-known passages to a young church in Rome, Paul wrote, *"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*⁴ And finally, the passage that is our text for this morning: *"God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. The person who has the Son has life; the individual who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who / believe in the name of the Son of God / so that you may know that you have eternal life."*⁵

¹ John 11:25-26

² John 10:14, 27-28

³ John 14:1-6,27

⁴ Romans 8:31-32,35,37-39

⁵ 1 John 5:11-13

As you spend more time developing a relationship with Jesus, studying the Bible, reading about his life and teachings, and having conversations with God in prayer, your faith will deepen, your soul will be nourished, and the more those doubts and questions and uncertainties will be banished.

In his book *In Search of Certainty*, Rev. Dr. John Guest tells several stories of people who were martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ.⁶

Dr. Guest then writes, “It may seem that I’m advocating martyrdom, but what I am pointing out is Christian confidence. These men and women were sure of what they believed. It was a certainty which sprang from what they believed. Dr. Guest continues: “Note again the Romans passage just quoted. ‘*I am certain nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ.*’ That is the uniform witness [of the martyrs]. None could snatch them from the hand of Jesus; He had said so. If you have the Son ‘*you have eternal life*’ said John. He wrote to those early Christians “*so that you may know that you have eternal life.*” No wishy-washy I-hope-against-hope kind of attitude here. That confidence can be ours. ...God wants us to be sure!”

[end of quote.]

Through God’s gift of faith, you can have the confident assurance of having eternal life. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, you will be able to repent, turn away from your sin, and put your faith in Jesus as your Savior. Your sins are washed away. You receive citizenship in the Kingdom of God; and the gift of eternal life.

The Kingdom of God is where the Lord pours out His blessing and where his sovereign rule is recognized and celebrated among men and women.

We pray every week during the Lord’s prayer: “Our Father, who art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done....”

As citizens of the Kingdom of God, we have righteousness and peace with God, and joy in the Holy Spirit.⁷ I have seen that joy in the lives of elderly members I visit. Their testimonies of God’s goodness and grace are such a blessing to hear! Their stories of how God has worked in their lives are a comfort and reassurance. Their confidence and trust in God’s goodness are a marvelous example for us to follow. There is a noticeable difference about those people who have lived their entire lives as citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Many times, I have stood by the bedside of a dying saint and read the glorious description of eternal life that is found in the *Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ* given to John on the island of Patmos at the end of his life.

READ: Rev 4:2-6, 8; 5:11-14.

[“At once I, John, was in the Spirit and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white, and had crowns of gold on their heads.

⁶ *In Search of Certainty*, by John Guest, p. 136

⁷ Romans 14:17

From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder... also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures. ... Day and night they never stopped saying

“Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.” ...

*[Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. ... Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: “To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power for ever and ever!” The four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshipped.]*⁸

Today, All Saints' Day, we honor and remember those who have died this year, who are already home with the Lord. As we stand vigil at the bedside of one who is dying, we cry because our loved one is leaving us, but we rejoice in the assurance that they are going home to be with the Lord Jesus to live eternally in His Kingdom. Because we know that *they* believed in the Son of God, we therefore know for certain that they have eternal life. Those of us who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ know that soon we too will join our loved ones in heaven and be reunited around the throne of God, at the feet of Jesus, joining with all the Saints in praising and glorifying our Lord.

What an incredibly perfect family reunion that will be!

Are you going?

Amen.

Benediction:

Jesus said to his disciples: “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

*May you be blessed with the gift of Faith, so that
by believing in the Name of the Son of God
you may KNOW that you have eternal life.*

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

⁸ Rev 4:2-6, 8; 5:11-14