

“A Mighty Chorus Singing ‘YES!’”

Homily by the Rev. Patricia Farris

Revelation 7:9-12

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!” And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, singing, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”



“O Lord”, the psalmist sang, “you have been our dwelling place for all generations”. The power and promise and challenge of those words from Psalm 90 we heard Matt and Ethan Crawford read for us last Sunday ring in our hearts this day more than any Sunday of the year. We bring to the forefront of our awareness all the saints, the great cloud of witnesses we call them, who have gone before and from whom we learn what it means to be God’s children, Christ’s disciples, people of the Way. All the saints who continue to teach us and guide us by their example and their continuing love for us and for Christ’s church. All the saints going forward, far, far ahead to the saints streaming into God’s New Heaven and New Earth at the end of time.

Our dwelling place for all generations. Our name for this, as recited in the Apostles’ Creed, is “the communion of saints.” This is the community of believers, living and dead, the faith community that stretches beyond space and time. Christians around the world, believers who came before us and those who will come after. We belong to this vast communion of saints. We worship with them this morning. As we share the sacrament of Holy Communion we feast with past, present and future followers of Christ Jesus. “O Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.”

The names of the saints of our own congregation we read aloud today, and the saints dear to us personally whose names we will raise, connect us to all those who have strived to sustain the faithful witness of this congregation across generations here in Santa Monica. The saints of the whole church connect us back even further. Back to the musicians whose hymns we sing this morning, whose words continue to teach us about the God who sustains us. Back to John, whose writings from the Book of Revelation Ron read this morning connect us to that early community of Christians.

All the way back to the psalmist himself who sang: “O Lord, you have been our dwelling place for all generations.” We rejoice and give thanks to God this day for all those who have preceded us in faith. We remember that we are not the first to venture forth in faith, not the first to face difficult challenges, not the first to summon the courage to serve and carry on. The saints this morning draw close and beckon us now to follow them along the Way that leads to life and life everlasting. Remain strong, they say, be of good courage. We have walked the way of the cross and we walk it now with you.

“O Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.”

A colleague of mine once described the communion of saints as our peanut gallery of sorts, sitting up in the balcony and beyond cheering us on, praying for us, encouraging us, rooting for us. They also hold us accountable for the lives we live now and the commitments we made.

They are the folks who said YES to God, a mighty chorus singing YES to God. Their YES created this opportunity for us now to take our place in the great circle of faith, picking up where they left off and forming a new faith community in which generations who come after us will say their own YES and carry the story forward long into the future.

You see, awareness of the communion of saints not only brings comfort and strength, it reminds us that we who would be disciples of Jesus Christ are not just living our lives in this moment. We are not just juggling all the demands of work, families, church and soccer schedules. We’re not even just deciding what our financial pledge to this church will be in 2018. We’re doing much more. We’re picking up the mantel. We’re laying a foundation. We’re writing our legacy. We’re determining right now, in all the choices we make and the priorities we set, just what kind of saint we will be. What example are we setting, not only for our children now, but for all generations of Christians to come?

“O Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.” God has called us into the church and placed us within the company of the saints. It is awesome. It is a gift and a tremendous responsibility. For the quality of our lives as Christians now impacts not only this present moment, this current congregation, the witness of Methodists in this city and around the world now, but for generations and generations to come.

The worship of All Saints Sunday grounds us in the faith and witness of the church through all time. It stands us on the shoulders of all who have gone before, that we might look out high up over the horizon and peer into the future. It shines a light on our lives, so that we might carefully examine just what kind of ancestor and saint we aspire to be, what kind of witness we will make, what sort of legacy we will leave. And it provides us with this holy meal to give us sustenance and strength for the journey. The bread of life, the cup of blessing, given to us by Christ Jesus himself. May it heal all your brokenness, clear the fog from your eyes, lift you up to higher aspirations and set your feet on a path of renewed commitment and faithfulness. May our worship this day bring forth a powerful new YES to the call of God.

Alleluia. Amen.

Notes:

Luis Bush. The YES Effect: Accepting God’s Invitation to Transform the World Around You. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2017.