

Texts: Revelation 7:9-17; Psalm 34:1-10, 22; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12

Can you see them? They come from every tribe and nation. They have skin of every color – from the deepest, darkest brown to the palest, translucent beige. Some have tattoos. Some have scars. Some bear the marks of torture. Some bear the marks of disease. Some died from starvation. Some died peacefully in their beds. They spoke every language ever invented. And as they worship at the throne of the Lamb, they sing in those very languages.

Can you hear them? They are singing. Some sing in a deep baritone. Some sing the soprano line. Some sing with children’s voices. Some sing with the raspier voices of old age. Some sing out in harmony. Some can’t carry a tune at all. And as they sing, they wave palm branches. These are the saints and angels, gathered around the throne, gathered in worship. As we are, gathered here.

Robed in white. Whatever they wore when they lived, it doesn’t matter anymore. Maybe during their lives, they dressed in the latest fashions. Maybe they dressed in hand-me-downs. Maybe they only had one outfit to their name. Maybe they had a closet full of clothes. Maybe what they wore was hand-sewn. Maybe it was made in a factory. Maybe they lived in a cold climate and wore fur. Maybe they lived in a warm climate and wore a sarong. Whatever the clothes that they wore in life, their garments of glory are white, washed in the blood of the Lamb who was crucified, the One who shed his blood for their lives and for yours.

Maybe you recognize some of their faces. Someone that you knew and loved. A parent, a sibling, a friend. A wife, a husband, a daughter, a son, a grandchild. Someone that you ate with, someone you shared a home with, someone you laughed with, someone you made love to, someone who went through good times and bad times with you. All of them are here, right here, right now, gathered as we are around the throne of the Lamb.

Today is the Feast of All Saints. Today is the day we remember those who have died in the faith. Some people say that the boundary between this life and the life to come are at their thinnest on this day. I think there is something to that. Because today we perceive that heavenly choir singing. Today as we worship, as we sing, we know that they are singing, too.

Because believers always sing. What are the Psalms but the songs of the faithful? We have just made that joyful noise together – we’ve sung “Shall we gather at the River.” We have spoken the words of the Psalm: “I will bless the Lord at all times; God’s praise shall continually be in my mouth.” We’ve joined with worshippers across time and space to proclaim “Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain.” No matter what is happening around us, believers always sing. Day or night, in the desert or at the oasis, whether in prison or free, during calm or storm, believers sing this song: “Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever!”

Even in the midst of evil, in the midst of war, of social upheaval, in the midst of famine, in the midst of fire. In the face of HIV and cancer and opioid addiction, in the face of hurricanes and hailstorms and forest fires; in the face of murder and revenge killings; in

the midst of racial profiling and false arrests; in the face of everything that threatens us, we sing with the saints and the angels because we know – we KNOW – that God will have the final word. We know that God holds our lives in his hands. We know that God has come to us from beyond the boundaries of history, come in to this world as a flesh-and-blood human being, to redeem us, to forgive us and to save us. We know that Christ is the Lamb of God and in his death and resurrection, that death will be swallowed up forever.

How do we know this? Take a look at these quilts. At their most basic, these quilts are made of individual threads. Those single threads have color and texture and when they are woven or knitted together they create a piece of fabric. Then they are sewn together with more thread into a beautiful pattern and tied with even more thread to make them strong and durable. The threads of these quilts tie us together, into a huge and beautiful quilt of humanity.

These quilts are a visible and physical image of the communion of saints. Just like in these quilts, the lives of every person, living or dead, intersects with many other lives. We remember today the lives of those in our congregation, those who we knew and loved in life, who have come out of the great ordeal and who surround the throne of the Lamb. Even though we can't see them or touch them any longer, each of those saints is part of this quilt as well.

We are about to send these quilts on a journey. This week they will be loaded up and taken to Scottsbluff, and from there they will travel on trucks and planes to other warehouses, and eventually they will be brought to schools and hospitals and refugee

camps all over the world. Maybe to a refugee camp in Jordan. Maybe to a hospital ward in India. Maybe to a tent city in Mauritania.

These quilts are the physical and tangible signs that we live in a global community, that our lives touch the lives of people we will never meet. These quilts are sacraments – visible signs of an invisible reality. These quilts will become signs of mercy, signs of solidarity, signs of blessing for those who will receive them. And the blessing goes both ways. We are blessed by those who will receive these quilts.

What we send along with these quilts is God’s hope. What we send along with these quilts is God’s comfort. What we send along with these quilts is God’s love. What we send along with these quilts is God’s peace. What we send along with these quilts is the echo of the songs that we sing and the echo of that saintly choir. What we send along with these quilts is God’s promise to wipe every tear from every eye.

These quilts are signs that we, too, hunger and thirst for a world in which there will be no more hunger or thirst. These quilts are signs that we long for – and are willing to work for – a world in which peace will break out instead of conflict. These quilts are signs of hope for the end of persecution, the end of suffering. These quilts are signs of God’s blessing.

The kingdom of heaven is like a quilt – cut, pieced and sewn together by loving hands and then given away. No one asks those who receive these quilts to prove that they are worthy. No one asked you whether you were worthy to be baptized. No one asks you

whether you are worthy be fed at God's table. God's invitation has no limits, no boundaries.

The kingdom of heaven has come near. All the saints are gathered around us, robed in white, joined in song. So sing out! For all the saints, who from their labors rest, who thee by faith before the world confessed; Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blessed. Alleluia! Alleluia!