

**ANNE's Sermon and service**  
**October 30th, 2022,**  
**A Sunday Service for Summerland United Church**  
**Student Minister Anne Ellis – Presiding**

**THEME CONVERSATION:**

It's Halloween weekend. Lots of costumes and dressing up and spooky decorations around town. We've turned Halloween into a strange fearfully festive occasion, which by the way I love. I also love the days following Halloween All Souls, All Saints and the Day of the Dead, as celebrated in Latin cultures. It is a time of intentional honouring our ancestors and those who have passed on. We, in North America, have a strange relationship with death, we fear it, avoid talking about it or turn it into something ghastly and scary to avoid the true emotions that accompany death: sorrow, grief and lament.

In Christian Tradition these days are our opportunity to both acknowledge these honest emotions and honour the people in our lives, whom we've lost and whom we continue to love.

If you have brought with you a memento that you would like to place on our communion table, please bring it forward now.

A little later in the service, we will take some time to name people who have been saints in our lives.

People who have inspired us brought us hope and brought us light and love. We will also take time to honour members of this community of faith, and other loved ones who have died this past year.

**SCRIPTURE READING: Revelation 7:9-17**

**REFLECTION:**

A few weeks ago, I read a post on the internet that stuck with me. "Think about a time in history. Any time, any year and you had an ancestor alive." It seems obvious when stated, but have we ever really given it any thought?

1918, the last pandemic, your ancestor survived. 1883 Krakatoa exploded; your ancestor survived. The last ice age, your ancestor survived. 65 million years ago the dinosaurs were wiped out, your ancestor survived. From the moment life began on this planet, your ancestor survived.

In the passage from Revelation today we heard about the great multitude who stand before the throne and the lamb, gifted with salvation because they came through the great tribulation. *Just who are these people?* They come from all lands and speak all languages, but *who* are they?

The book of Revelation is a mysterious and downright bizarre vision of the end times, of an apocalypse that will, according to it, bring about the complete annihilation of the world as we know it.

While we might not know the book of Revelation well, we've probably all heard references to it: The four horsemen of the apocalypse, the seventh seal is broken. These are symbols of destruction, war,

famine, disease and death. The horsemen come at the end of chapter 6 and the seventh seal is broken at the beginning of chapter 8.

Right in the middle of these intense and frightening images is Chapter 7. There are two visions of peace and calm in this chapter where we read about what happens to those who 'come through the great tribulation.' The first vision in the chapter, v. 1 -8 lists the tribes and numbers of people who, it seems, will be *chosen* to survive.

Yet, the second vision, the one we're focused on today tells a different story. Those who survive are a multitude so enormous that no one can count them.

It is everyone.

Who among us can say they've lived a life without tribulation? Especially after the pandemic. Yes, our tribulations have varied and some of us may think, *mine aren't as bad as some others*. But there isn't a scale balancing your hardship against another's. We are not measured at the end of our days by what we have overcome, despite what it may look like from this passage.

There are so many people gifted with the solace of God's shelter and comfort, the multitude is beyond counting.

It is everyone.

As I mulled over this passage this week, I found myself asking the question – is this the afterlife? Or is this the here and now? Today we celebrate All Saints, a day in the Christian tradition to honour the saints in our lives. Not just the capital S saints in the world, but the little s saints who have been saints to us personally.

Take a moment and think about those people, picture their faces, hear their voices, and remember who they were and the gifts they brought to your life and the world. Say their names: Carolyn, Peggy, Lawrence, Kerry.

*Can you picture all of these people within the great multitude before the throne of God?*

On All Souls, the day after All Saints, we honour our ancestors and those who've gone before us, family and friends. Those who survived their own tribulations until their lives were done.

*Can you picture all of these people within the great multitude before the throne of God?*

Take a moment now and imagine all of those who did not survive their tribulations. All of the lives lost in the pandemic, the wars, the famines, the residential schools, random and purposeful violence, disease, and illness. *Can you picture all of these people within the great multitude before the throne of God?*

As hard as it might be, picture those who perpetrated, profited from, and gained power because of all of these things. *Can you picture them within the great multitude before the throne of God?*

It is everyone.

This great multitude before God is wearing white robes and holding palm branches, evoking our memories of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. A day of celebration and joy, with no knowledge of the sorrow yet to come.

Yet, we know now what's going to happen in a few short days. We know the pain, the suffering Jesus will endure on that fateful Friday.

And still every year we wave our palm branches in the pews. With joy and happiness, we re-enact this promise of a new world while knowing by the end of the week all that we thought we knew will be destroyed.

We read in Revelation that the great multitude has washed their robes clean in the blood of the Lamb. My modern sensibilities are slightly disturbed by this image, but here again, we are reminded of the sacrifice and the suffering of Jesus on that Friday morn.

And Revelation tells us that this multitude of people have experienced the same thing.

They have suffered, they have bled, and they are now robed in white. As Jesus was when Mary saw him at the tomb on Easter morning.

And finally when Jesus ascended to God in the heavens, figures in white robes were present there too. Three times we hear of the great multitude dressed in white; three reminders of Jesus' passion, Jesus' gift.

One that appears to have now been bestowed on everyone from every nation, every tribe, every language and people. A death, a resurrection, an ascension for all people.

It is everyone.

*I asked earlier if you could picture all of these people within the great multitude before the throne of God?*

And I invite you into one more. Picture yourself. Take a moment to remember that you have survived every hard day you've had so far. You have been through tribulations and come to the other side. Life, being what it is, probably means that there are tribulations ahead and we can't know what they will be. But I think it is safe to assume they will occur.

Revelation 7 is not just a vision for those gone before us. It is a vision for us.

Those of us present today, may still experience times of hunger and thirst and the sun may still scorch us over head and we may have trouble finding the living waters. But we can know that God is present, God is with us and we may seek shelter in Gods presence.

Today as we take the time to remember our ancestors and remember the saints who have gone before us, let's remember their perseverance, their strength with honour and gratitude. We are here because of them.

We may struggle as they did, we may suffer as they did, in our days of tribulation ahead we can draw our own strength from them, just as we also draw strength from knowing that no matter what pain and tribulations may lay ahead, God will wipe away every tear from our eyes, just as God has always done.

May it be so.