

**The Other Side of the Curtain**  
**Revelation 7:9-17 and Matthew 5:1-12**  
**November 5, 2023, All Saint's Sunday**  
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**Grand Rapids, MI**

Today is our Remembrance or All Saints Sunday. The day that churches around the world remember and share our collective grief of death and loss. For we understand that grief and loss are universal to all. Like Benjamin Franklin once said, "Nothing is certain except death and taxes." But in my opinion death is worse, in part because we don't know what happens after death. It is one of the big questions of life and mysteries of faith that we try to answer.

As Christians, we turn to the Bible to find comfort, hope and some inkling of what happens when someone dies. I especially find the words of Jesus in the beatitudes, as words of comfort. In fact, both passages give us hope that our grief and mourning will be comforted. Every tear will be wiped from our eyes, and we will once again experience the blessings of God. Our hearts will once again be filled with gratitude and praise, as God delivers us from pain and suffering.

As I reflect on this topic, I am reminded that even Jesus experienced grief and sorrow. When his dear friend Lazarus died, Jesus comes to the tomb, even knowing that he would soon live again, Jesus wept. God is moved by our grieving. There are several passages in scripture where we see God respond to the cries of the helpless and is moved to action. When Ishmael cried, God sent an angel and led Hagar and Ishmael to water. When the Israelites cried out in Egypt, God called Moses to deliver them. When Hannah cried and prayed, longing for a baby of her own, God blessed her with Samuel, who became a great prophet. Even in the Gospels Jesus is moved to compassion upon hearing the cries of others. Time and again we see the compassionate heart of God responding to the pain and suffering of others. Isaiah 53:4-6 reminds us of the suffering messiah that we attribute to Jesus:

Surely, he has borne our infirmities  
and carried our diseases,  
yet we accounted him stricken,  
struck down by God, and afflicted.  
But he was wounded for our transgressions,  
crushed for our iniquities.  
Upon him was the punishment that made us whole,  
and by his bruises we are healed.  
All we like sheep have gone astray.  
We have all turned to our own way,  
and the Lord has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.

This is the image of the lamb we read in Revelation. The lamb of God, who has born our transgressions has become our great shepherd. These words in Revelation and Matthew were written for the audience of the early church who were oppressed and downtrodden by the oppressive Roman Empire, who blamed the Ceasar's atrocities on the Christian community when Rome burned and Jerusalem was sacked. Jesus' words assured the people that they were not cursed but blessed of God for remaining faithful to the commands of love and compassion even in the face of such vitriol and violence. These were the first saints of the church.

“So, on today of all days, may we give thanks for those who have stepped into that unseen horizon of grace—who have shaped us into the people we are, who have loved us and failed us and everything in between, and who call us now to a life of hope, to a life of daring to believe death and pain do not have the final word. This means worshiping, even in the wreckage of this war-torn world. It means seeing what the world cannot see that God has revealed this truth, that we are all God's children, and that one day we will sit together at a great feast, robed together in a white where there will be no more tears, no more hunger, no more suffering.”<sup>1</sup>

“Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

<sup>1</sup> Jessica Miller Kelley, ed., *A Preacher's Guide to Lectionary Sermon Series: Thematic Plans for Years A, B, and C, First ed.* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 65–80. Written by Brian Erickson—the good news about death.— Theme and concluding paragraph taken from this resource.