**Revelation 7:9-17 All Saints’ Day/Stewardship Sunday**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our First Reading, Revelation chapter 7 here re-reading these words. “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is an injustice going on right now as we speak, and usually today, November 1st is the start of days and even weeks of this happening. It is an act that is done against children by their parents and if it happened anywhere else it would be prosecuted to the full extent of the law for the crime that it is in the eyes of our government and in the enforcement of our laws. This heinous crime is of course theft. In the eyes of God it falls under the 7th Commandment, “You shall not steal” and the particular kind of stealing I’m talking about is parents stealing their children’s Halloween candy. This candy, which was given to children on Halloween night, or perhaps at some other Halloween related event, for example the Trunk or Treat event that we hosted here at Trinity Onekama last week, this candy is the child’s property, put into their bucket, pillow case, or bag with the understanding that it’s theirs. Yet parents take it and eat it as if it were their own. Perhaps right now, you feel the mirror of the Law upon your own heart, as you remember times when you committed this horrible injustice and stole from your very own beloved children.

After all, it’s the child’s candy right? But the other side of the story is that any parent can remember buying or even making their child’s costume. Any parent can remember putting the child into their costume. Any parent can remember getting the bucket ready for them, and driving them to the event or from house to house. Any parent can remember walking up to the door with the child, and perhaps even knocking on the door for the child. All the child did to “earn” their candy was just to put out the bucket, or the pillow case, or the bag, most times any parent can even remember having to tell the child to say “trick or treat” taking the candy from the person, putting it into the child’s bag, and then having to remind the child to say “thank you.” So it’s not a stretch to say that a child wouldn’t even have any candy in the first place if it wasn’t for the parent. As a matter of fact, the parent wouldn’t even have to take the candy of their child, if the child would recognize this. If the child was properly thankful. If the child were to offer to the parent a gift of candy as a way of saying thank you for everything that was done for them so that they could enjoy this observance of all Hallows Eve.

Which brings us to a very interesting Sunday here at Trinity Lutheran Church in Onekama, because today is the day after Halloween, but it also is the day after Reformation Day, and it’s All Saints’ Day, and we have chosen this Sunday as the Sunday for our rescheduled Stewardship Sunday. Which means that after you all showered me with wonderful gifts of appreciation for being your pastor, to which I am very thankful for, you then set before me this challenging Sunday of so many different observances. So how do all of these different themes fit together? The answer is found in our Sermon Hymn.

We just sang these words together, “Take my *life* and let it be, Consecrated Lord to Thee, Take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.” If we look at the overall context of this hymn we’re talking about a stewardship of our time and actions rather than our physical lives, but in truth the two are interconnected. You can tell someone to “get a life” in the sense of having a personal life or a social life with friends and others, but how you spend your time is how you live your life. To commit time to something is to give it your life because we all are gifted with the same 24 hours in a day. We are singing in this hymn, and really we are praying these words, for God to take our lives here on Earth, and in that same way, by taking our lives here on Earth we are praying for him to take our lives on that fateful day when we leave this earth and go to heaven. As we sing in verse 6, “Take my love, my Lord, I pour, At Thy feet its treasure store; Take myself, and I will be, Ever, only, all for Thee.”

It is that “Ever” that we understand in light of our eternal life and that’s what we remember on All Saints’ Day. We remember those that we have lost in this past year. We remember the moment that their lives were taken, and when they left this valley of sorrow to be with God in eternal rest and in eternal peace. Our First Reading speaks about this in glorious detail, giving us a picture of what they experience in the presence of the Lamb of God. “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” Now that sounds like a life worth living, a life without pain or struggle, a life without hunger or thirst, without mourning or sadness, a life of unlimited happiness as God’s own child. But we gloss over an aspect of their lives in heaven. Look again at these words. “Therefore they are before the throne of God and *serve* him day and night in his temple.”

Service, and Stewardship go hand in hand. They are understood together because being a faithful steward means that you serve others and serve God with the gifts that He has given to you. The gifts that he has trusted you with as his faithful steward. Again, we all have been given the same amount of time, 24 hours in a day, 7 days in a week, in which we *get* to serve the Lord. But how much of that time do we give to God in service to him or in acts of thanksgiving for all that he’s already given to us? The truth is the service never stops, God created Adam and Eve to tend to the Garden of Eden, to name the animals, to work. They were stewards of creation. We are not created or called to just do whatever we want all the time, we aren’t called to just sit around and be slothful and lazy when God has called us to serve, not even when we go to be with God in heaven. We are God’s creation, designed in love, with the Spirit of God breathed in our lungs, the very spirit of life, and created with purpose to do God’s Will.

Which brings us back to this great injustice in our world, of parents eating their children’s candy. I tell this story not as a cautionary tale against the 7th commandment, but more to illustrate the true meaning behind our sermon hymn. See, we get upset when we think that others are taking what is ours. We get upset when we look at our time, and our money, and our talents, as something that is ours and that we get to do whatever we want with. We don’t like it when others tell us what to do with it. It’s ours. No one else has any right to it. But again, the children wouldn’t have the candy in the first place if it wasn’t for their parents. You wouldn’t have your life, or your time, or your money, or your talents, or a future, or a purpose, if it wasn’t for God. Hear the words of Psalm 24:1, “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world and all who live in it.” And Deuteronomy 8, “You may say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.’ But remember the Lord your God for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth.” It isn’t your wealth. It isn’t your life, it’s Gods because He is the one who sent His very own Son Jesus Christ into this world of sin to buy you back from eternal death and destruction. You wouldn’t have any hope or future if it wasn’t for the Lamb of God who has washed you and made you pure and clean in his blood, the blood he shed for you.

So how can you not give back to him for all that he’s given to you? How can you not show your thankfulness by properly understanding your time as a gift of God to be used in service to others rather than just in service to yourself? How can you not return to the Lord Your God the first fruits of what He has blessed you with in terms of your money and possessions? How can you not return to the Lord in service to the church and in using your talents in the furthering of the mission of this Church, which is to serve others, and to tell them about Jesus Christ? You may ask yourself, “Do I have to do these things?” If I don’t give of myself, and my time, and my money, and my talents, and myself, and give my life to God in the sense of what we’re talking about in this hymn will there be serious consequences? Like not paying a bill and they shut off my power, or take my house and my car? Are we talking about service done by coercion and force, with the threat of punishment being the only motivating factor?

Never. When we look at the lives of those that we have lost this past year, or really all those that we remember losing throughout our lives, we don’t remember their perfect obedience. We don’t remember their actions and how they’ve earned salvation from God based on what they have done. We look to the love of God and how that love saved them from physical death and gave them eternal life. “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.” These words from our Epistle lesson from 1 John show us that our relationship to God is that of a child. A child who does the things that they are instructed not out of fear, but out of thanksgiving. Out of an understanding that everything they have was bought and given by their parents who love them.

It’s not something you have to do or else, it’s something you get to do, out of thanksgiving to God for all that he has done for you. So go and serve in gladness, and thanksgiving, and not out of fear. See the Lord giving to you and return thanks not in such a way that you think that God is cheating you or stealing from you. Know that God loves you, that he sent his Son to die for you, and that he is with you always. At every step of your life. The life you gave him. So that when your last hour comes, whenever that may be, if it’s after a long life of service, or a short time of being his child here on Earth, you know with confidence, that you will ever, only, and always be His child.

Amen

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.