

“SEALED” – Pr Jim Sprengle, All Saints Day, November 1, 2020

- I. **Revelation 7:3** – The angel said, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.”
- II. **The Book of Revelation is hard to understand.**
 - a. I’m not sure how many of you have read it, but it really helps to have someone guide us through it.
 - b. In fact, it can seem more like a horror story than a comfort because it’s so easy to get caught up in all the tribulation and destruction.
 - c. Today’s lesson is one of several pauses or interludes between the destruction and death.
 - i. In chapters 5-6, a scroll with 7 seals is opened... and with these broken seals comes the famous four horsemen of the apocalypse
 - ii. The white horse represents tyranny, dictators and enslavement
 - iii. The red horse represents bloodshed, war and murder
 - iv. The black horse represents famine and starvation
 - v. And the pale horse represents death and the grave – what happens when the other three horses do their thing...
 - d. As all these seals are opened, it says at the end of chapter 6 that people on earth try to hide, and even hope for the mountains to fall on them
 - e. And then... this interlude of chapter 7... this break from all the death and destruction... this kind of peace or hope that God wants to save us
- III. **In our reading today God holds back the final destruction to seal people.**
 - a. Maybe you have heard about a signet ring?
 - i. The signet ring is an ancient way of signing documents and decrees by royal families and leaders
 - ii. The oldest ones they have found go back over 5000 years ago
 - iii. The ring has a reverse or negative impression on it, so when you stamp it into clay, or wax, or any other soft material it leaves the “signature” of that person on it.
 - iv. The royals from England pass these down, and they are official stamps with a family coat of arms or other important information.
 - v. On the front of your bulletin is a wax seal with a cross stamped in it, and it shows how wax was used to seal letters and documents.
 - b. The strange connection to our reading in Revelation today is that the seals that are being broken on the scroll in heaven are God’s wrath against sin... but then a pause...
 - i. God is placing His special seal on the “servants of God” (vs 3)
 - ii. All of the 12 tribes of Israel are represented from Genesis 49
 - c. As much as we get lost in the names and numbers of this long list (usually we sort of check out during the readings of lines of ancestry and long lists of names...) these people represent us!

- i. We, by faith, have been grafted into the tribes of Israel. (Romans 11:17-24)
- ii. Each time a person comes to faith, they are sealed with the signet ring of God... and they become a follower of Jesus Christ.
- d. The interesting thing about this first half of our reading is the battle formation – several places in the Old Testament gather up the tribes or count them for the purpose of going to war.
- e. As I said in my introduction, the saints of God come in two forms... the Church Triumphant – or those in glory, and the Church Militant – or those who are here on earth in the spiritual battle.

IV. **As Christians, we are in a battle until the day we die...**

- a. Some people cannot stand the idea of war and violence, which is good – we are a people of peace, meekness, and mercy as Jesus says in the Gospel lesson
- b. Yet, sin and death and the devil are in attack mode every day of our lives
- c. Are you one of the walking wounded? Have you been beat up by:
 - i. The pandemic? Loneliness... fear and anxiety?
 - ii. The political and race issues? Fear for the future – hostility?
 - iii. Young people without Church? What will happen in 20 years?
 - iv. Economic issues? What happens when our economy crashes?
 - v. Natural disasters? Fires, floods, hurricanes... loss...
- d. The problem here is that satan is at war with us... trying to take as many people with him as possible before the return of King Jesus.
- e. You see, people do one of two things when trials and tribulations occur... they either turn toward God... or turn away from God.
 - i. We all know the person who doesn't believe in God because bad things happen therefore how can God be good.
 - 1. It seems they don't understand that sin, death and the devil were unleashed by Adam and Eve...
 - 2. It seems they don't understand that they are not perfect and holy – that the world and everything in it will degrade and breakdown – including our bodies
 - 3. It seems they don't understand that God saw a way to redeem the brokenness and loss by sending Jesus... (John 3:16)
 - ii. Jesus Christ, God Himself, came into the world to conquer sin, death and devil – because those who are called and sealed in His name have no fear over any of these things... they have no real power over God's children whether we are saints on earth or saints in glory!

V. **God placed His seal on us in Baptism.**

- a. The word, "seal" is used many times to describe God's claim on His people
 - i. In the Old Testament, God used circumcision as a seal (Roman 4:11)
 - ii. In the New Testament, God uses Baptism as a seal or claim –

1. Colossians 2:11-12 says, “In [Jesus] also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with Him in Baptism”
 - iii. So, the seal or claim God has on us comes through faith and Baptism... which we know Baptism gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit as it says in Ephesians 1:13-14, “In [Jesus] you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it...”
 - iv. And finally, later in the Book of Revelation it says, “Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion (heaven) stood the Lamb, and with Him 144,000 who had His name and His Father’s name written on their foreheads.” (Revelation 14:1)
- b. All this comes down to something very simple and powerful – God has placed His seal of ownership on all who believe.
- c. Yes, we as the Church Militant will face trials and tribulations like so many others – but don’t let that get you down.
 - i. The horror story of revelation is actually a hopeful story for all who are sealed... because we know that this struggle is not the rest of the story... this is not the end
 - ii. Thankfully God shows us both sides of the story...
- d. In the first part of our reading we are shown the Church Militant, lined up for battle, sealed in our Baptisms... and the second part shows the Church Triumphant – they won the battle and have the crown of life.
 - i. The white, baptismal and confirmation robes they wear are bleached as pure and white as anything we could imagine because of Christ’s blood on the cross
 - ii. They see with their own eyes the power and glory of God with their own eyes
 - iii. They cannot help but praise and worship and sing out with joy and thanksgiving as they have been delivered from sin, death, and satan
- e. As God’s saints, we do not focus on the horror story that is around us... we focus on the hope of a life that conquers... because we are sealed.
- f. Remember your Baptism each day, and especially that mark the pastor placed on your forehead and your heart to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified.
 - i. You are sealed, you are a saint by Jesus’ work, and no matter what happens in this life... by God’s grace, you win the battle! Amen.