

Pastor Chris Matthis  
Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado  
All Saints' Day (Observed)  
Saturday, November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017  
Sunday, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017

**Sermon:** A New Song

**Texts:** Psalm 149; Revelation 7:9-17

Focus Statement: Worship begins with the joy of our salvation.

Function Statement: That they would rejoice in hope of Christ's promised final victory.

Sermon Structure: Text-Application

Doctrinal Locus: "For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him" (SC, First Article of Apostles' Creed).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. "Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the godly!" (Ps. 149:1, ESV).<sup>1</sup> Praising the Lord might sound like a strange thing to do on our commemoration of All Saints, especially since this annual service of the Church usually feels somber and tends toward the effect of a mass funeral for all the Christian dead. But All Saints was never supposed to be a sad occasion, for as Christians we do not "grieve as others do who have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13). We rejoice in the hope of the promised resurrection when Christ returns to raise the dead and gather his Church. And, in the meantime, we take comfort in the fact that the departed saints of God are at rest with the Lord. For in the Lord's "presence there is fullness of joy; at [his] right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11). Our loved ones are never truly lost to us if they belong to Jesus, for in Christ we shall have them again on the Last Day.

And that is why the psalmody appointed for All Saints' Day resounds with such a joyful, boisterous cry: "Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of

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<sup>1</sup> All Scriptures, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

the godly!” (Ps. 149:1). “Praise the Lord” is *Hallelujah* in the Hebrew Old Testament. In our modern liturgies, beholden to Greek and Latin, we say *Alleluia*, which means the same thing: “Praise the Lord!” One is a translation of the other.

*Hallelujah!* Praise the Lord and sing to him a new song! “New song” doesn’t just mean a new composition—a brand, new hymn or a contemporary praise song, although it could mean that. What “new song” really implies is a change in key, a different tone, a joyful turn because of what God has done for us. And what has God done for us? Scholars guess that because of the martial imagery at the end of the psalm (vv. 6b-9), this might have been a song of victory to praise God after success on the battlefield. But there’s an even deeper cause for celebration: God made us (v. 2); and he saves us (v. 4).

The Psalm continues: “Let Israel be glad in his Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King!” (Ps. 149:2). We praise God because he made us. As our loving, heavenly Father, he gave us life, knitting together our bodies in our mothers’ wombs and then providing all that we need for our daily bread. As Martin Luther writes in the Small Catechism, “He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life.... All this He does only out of father, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him” (SC, First Article of Apostles’ Creed). God gives us clothing, shoes, house and home, food and drink, our family, friends, freedom, good government, and even protection from evil. We deserve none of it, fallen sinners that we are. Yet in his infinite mercy, God graciously gives us all things. How could we *not* praise him?

Yet God does so much more than that. In verse 4, the Psalmist declares, “For the LORD takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation” (Ps. 149:4). The second reason we praise God is because he *saves* us. When God saw us drowning in sin and doomed to

die, he did not abandon us to death and the grave. No, he sent his Son Jesus to die on the cross, saving us from the wrath to come and showing the way to eternal life. He scooped us up in his hands—hands that bear the mark of the nails and the proof of his great love for you. Of course, the Psalms are not the only place where God’s people praise him for saving them. We hear it in our reading from Revelation: “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb”; and “Amen! Blessings and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen” (Rev. 7:12).

Do those words sound familiar? Of course, they do! They’re part of the hymn of praise we often sing on Communion Sundays titled “This Is the Feast.” Much of our liturgy comes from the Psalms and Revelation. In another sermon long ago, I referred to Revelation as “heaven’s hymnal” because of its many songs and hymns of praise that have found their way into the Church’s liturgy even here on earth. Or didn’t you know that when we chant the liturgy, we are simply singing Scripture?

God made us, and in Christ he saved us. So praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song! But where do we praise him? In every part of our lives. The psalmist says to praise him “in the assembly of the godly” (Ps. 149:1). In the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint), the word for assembly (*ekklēsia*) is also the New Testament word for “church.” So we praise God in church, during public worship, when we sing “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart” (Eph. 5:19). But we also praise him at home, even “on [our] beds” (v. 5). Indeed, the apostle Paul will say that, in response to God’s amazing grace, our entire life is to be one of joyful, loving service to the Lord. “I appeal to you, therefore, brothers [and sisters], by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a *living sacrifice*, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom. 12:1). Notice that

Paul didn't say worship begins and ends in the four walls of the church. As we go out of the church *into the world*, carrying out of our vocations and calling, loving our neighbor and serving others to God's glory, we are actually, literally *worshiping* him with our bodies! So when you go to work or school tomorrow, you can still worship Jesus! *Hallelujah!* Praise the Lord!

There are all kinds of ways to praise the Lord in worship. In Psalm 149 alone, the psalmist mentions singing (v. 1), dancing (v. 3), and playing musical instruments, like the tambourine and lyres (v. 3). Other psalms mention clapping (Ps. 47:1), shouting (Ps. 33:1), and all variety of other instruments, such as trumpets, lutes, harps, strings, pipes, and even "loud crashing cymbals" (Ps. 150:3-5). In fact, the Psalms end with the command, "Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!" (Ps. 150:6). By the way, nowhere is made mention of pipe organs or guitars. But based on the number of instruments mentioned in Scripture, I think those are all okay. Whatever instruments we have should be employed to praise our wonderful Savior.

Psalm 149 starts as a joyful hymn of praise—a "new song"—to our Maker, Savior, and Lord. But it ends rather strangely to our ears. The last three-and-a-half verses are all about death and judgment. It even encourages us to have "two-edged swords in [our] hands" (v. 6b)! Now I don't think this has anything to do with the Second Amendment or concealed carry permits and church. Because of the parallel structure of Hebrew poetry, I am tempted to assign a spiritual meaning to the swords. They're paired with "the high praises of God," so maybe something like "the sword of the Spirit" is meant here, which the New Testament calls the Word of God (Eph. 6:17). After all, "the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

But I still don't think that's what the Psalmist is talking about. I think he's actually talking about swords—literal, actual swords that kill people. Psalm 149 is a call to arms—not a Crusade against Muslims or a justification for any old war we feel like fighting, but for a holy war. The Psalmist calls on God's saints “to execute vengeance on the nations and punishments on the peoples, to bind their kings and their nobles with fetters of iron, to execute on them the judgment written!” (Ps. 149:7-9a). All of this sounds strange to Christians used to Jesus telling us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. And right now—at this point in history—this call to arms *is* out of place. “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12, NIV).

Yet all that will change on the Last Day when Christ returns in all his glory to judge both the living and the dead. In Revelation 19 Jesus is pictured as a conqueror riding a white horse. He is called “the King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev. 19:16). And “from his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron” (Rev. 19:15). When Christ came the first time, he came in mercy, born as a baby in a lowly manger and dying on a cross like a criminal. But when he comes on the Last Day, he will come in glory to judge the nations and destroy the kings and rulers of the earth gathered against him. He will subdue his enemies and defeat those who dared, in this life, to persecute his Church. Jesus will destroy the Destroyer and usher in a peace that never ends.

And what shall we do in response? We will praise him! And sing a new song: “Hallelujah”—praise the Lord!—“for the Lord our God the Almighty reigns” (Rev. 19:6). We will praise the Lord who saved us on the cross. And we will praise the Lord who will save us on

that Day. “This is honor for all his godly ones. Praise the Lord!” (Ps. 149:9). In the name of the Father and of the Son and of  $\text{†}$  the Holy Spirit. Amen.