

## Pastor Mark Jacobson † Saints Triumphant Sermon † November 14, 2021

<sup>25</sup>Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. <sup>26</sup>For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. <sup>27</sup>And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. <sup>28</sup>“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice <sup>29</sup>and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. – John 5:25-29

### THE SAINTS IN HEAVEN WERE MADE WHILE LIVING ON EARTH

“Are you a saint?” If you are an 8<sup>th</sup> grade student in our catechism class, you have about a 1 in 6 chance of being asked that question on the day of your examination. It’s a simple “yes” or “no” question, but it’s become a tough “yes” or “no” question because saint “ain’t” a word in our English Bibles anymore. Here at Grace, we have chosen to use The New International Version as our English translation since I don’t know when, a long time ago. And in the 1984 edition there was 45 times the term “saint” or “saints” was used and now in the latest 2011 edition there are 0 times when the term “saint” or “saints” is used in our translation. Thankfully, one of our liturgical responses is, “Therefore with all the SAINTS ON EARTH and hosts of heaven, we praise your holy name and join their glorious song.”

Many English Translators of the Bible have given up on the word “saints” because most of their readers would think they were talking about dead people. The Apostle Paul was not writing to dead people when he addressed his letters to the saints in Ephesus or to the saints in Philippi. Those saints were living, and they weren’t called saints because they had performed at least two miracles or had lived an exemplary life with extraordinary service. They were made saints because they heard the voice of the gospel through faith. Our Lutheran Catechism has this definition for saint: Holy one. Every believer in Christ is a saint because through faith in Christ each believer has the holiness of Christ. So the “yes” or “no” answer to the question, “Are you a saint?” is most definitely, “Yes!” Remember that 8<sup>th</sup> graders and those who try to mouth the right answers from the pews.

#### 1. They heard the voice of the gospel through faith.

Jesus highlights this “Yes” answer in today’s Gospel. *“Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.”* There are three different ways the Bible speaks about life and about death. The Bible speaks of physical life, spiritual life, and eternal life. Conversely, the Bible also speaks of physical death, of being spiritually dead, and suffering eternal damnation. All physical life has been and is created by God through his Word. At creation God breathed into man the breath of life. At creation God’s Word also established the process through which mankind would multiply and increase in number. The study of biology is the study of God’s creating of physical life.

Of course not everything is physical. Your thoughts are not physical. Your feelings are not physical. Your will, especially your will or desire to believe in Jesus or to not believe in Jesus, exists not in the physical realm of what you can see and touch, but in the spiritually realm of your thoughts and feelings. The Bible tells us this will or faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ. The word of Christ today is, *“For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.”* This life Jesus talks about is not having a heartbeat and a pulse. When Jesus says, *“I am the way and the truth and the life,”* the life he is talking about is the person who has an ear for the gospel and who lives to follow Jesus. As a Christian the Bible says, “to live is Christ and to die is gain.” The Bible also says, “Whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.”

Ain’t it great to be a saint! Ain’t it great to be washed clean of all our sins at baptism and declared a holy and dear child of our Father. Ain’t it great to have our faith strengthened through the receiving

of Christ's body and blood in Holy Communion! And ain't it great to have ears that hear the Word of God preached and taught and in print and pixelated and in the hearts of every single Christian and at any given moment ready to be spoken from their mouths. The Word of God, especially the gospel, was first heard soon after the first sin, and the Word of God is still heard today even now so that people can know about Jesus and believe in him.

In the church, this time when a person can learn about Jesus and believe in him, is called their time of grace. A person's time of grace begins as soon as they are born, and their time of grace ends when they die. And so we baptize babies, and we leave the unborn and the little ones who die without the blessing of baptism in the hands of our gracious God. Already at the baptism font we talk to parents and our congregation about the responsibility to teach and train their children and in a congregational sense, our children. This teaching and training doesn't end until God says so, and so all of our church activities have the goal of either bringing people to faith in Jesus or keeping them in the faith.

The saints in heaven were made while living on earth. They heard the voice of the gospel through faith, through the ministry activity of preaching and teaching, our daily at-home Bible reading and home devotions. And they, the saints in heaven, won't be amazed at their bodily resurrection.

## **2. They won't be amazed at their bodily resurrection.**

Jesus takes us to this second point when he says, "*And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out.*" Some people hear the voice of the gospel during their time of grace and others don't. Some people keep the faith. Other give up, but all people who are in their graves or in their niches or urns or scattered across planet earth or beyond will hear his voice and come out.

I think that day will be amazing, and it is. We will see Jesus and everybody else, but Scripture also tells that the actual rising from the dead will kind of be like every other day. Every day we go to bed and every day we wake up. The resurrection of the dead will be like waking up, but it won't be with the sunshine or the alarm clock or something else. That final waking will be with the miraculous voice of Jesus who has life in himself. He will get all people out of their dead sleep more easily than we can get others, or even ourselves, out of bed.

And "*...those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.*" This is a tough passage for us to understand. We are "Grace Lutheran Church," not "Those Who Have Done Good Lutheran Church." Can you imagine attending "Those Who Have Done Good Lutheran Church?" In the Lutheran Church we emphasize sin and we emphasize the Savior. It's all about Jesus here. 'All about Jesus' is not limited to his living and dying and rising for us to save us from sins. 'All about Jesus' is also Jesus living in us and helping us with our thoughts and our feelings and our words and our actions. There is no limit to all the good we can do through faith in Jesus. And yet there is a limit of time on some of the good we can do.

In heaven, we will worship and work. In heaven we will always serve Jesus, but did you realize that in heaven, we will never again forgive one another of our sins, and that we will never again bear with one another in love. In heaven we will never again have the opportunity to witness to an unbeliever and witness Jesus working faith in that person's heart. Those are ministry activities we will only do on earth and so with the strength God provides, let's do those good ministry activities. For all the saints in heaven were made on earth through Word and Sacrament activities and right now, not in heaven, right now we get to participate in these Word of God, time of grace, activities. Ain't it great! Amen.