ALL SAINTS – November 7, 2021

SCRIPTURES – 1 John 3:1-3; Rev. 21 & 22; John 5:24-29

*“Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.”* Rev. 21:10

***“O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days.”*** These words from Ps. 39 are included in our Introit today, and they certainly are very fitting. For, following this sermon I will read the names of those members of our congregation who died this past year. Yes, we all need to know our end… to remember that our days are measured and so prepare for our end. Even our society encourages this: with retirement planning seminars, will preparation seminars, etc.

And yet, we Christians, even as we see and deal with the ugliness of our world and our own sins, can focus upon this in a different way, a very positive way. An old song I heard the other day brought this to mind. In 1963 Jimmy Soul had a hit song about marriage. He sang:

If you wanna be happy for the rest of your life

Never make a pretty woman your wife

So for my personal point of view

Get an ugly girl to marry you

*“Wow!”* I thought. *“How Biblical!”* For, after this sermon we will hear from the 21st and 22nd chapters of Revelation. We’ll hear one of God’s angels say to the apostle John, ***“Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.”*** (Rev. 21). Jesus, the Lamb of God, Himself came to take a bride! His Church, His believers – you and me – are that bride.

And, boy, are we an ugly bride! Jesus didn’t choose you and me and call us to follow Him because of how great and wonderful and beautiful we are. Oh, we are not: not individually; not as a group, a church. This is especially seen as we look where Jesus looks: not at outer appearances, but within.

Jesus says, ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”*** He speaks of hearing and believing, things which involve the mind and heart. He also speaks of judgment – a matter of the mind and heart. These “inner” things are His focus; and there, in our hearts and minds, is where our ugliness is most clearly seen.

***“The world does not know us,”*** says John in our epistle reading (1 John 3). More and more we are finding this to be so today. How at odds with our sin-embracing and celebrating society are we Christians! But also, how many times have you heard someone say, *“I don’t believe in organized religion, because people are hypocrites.”* And, you know something… they’re right. We do act contrary to what we say and believe. We are hypocrites!

This is where our ugliness is most truly seen. We rejoice in being forgiven and not judged by God; and yet, we think judgmentally of one another… we speak about one another and spread gossip… we grumble about one another. Social media makes this easy. We do this in society. We do it in church. You know that we do!

Jesus certainly knows. Nothing is hidden from Him! And yet, He came and sought us out. He intentionally sought an ugly girl to marry! Today’s Gospel reading is an example. It was to people who so opposed Him that they wanted to kill Him that Jesus said, ***“whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.”*** *Whoever*. He invited even them to believe in Him and so not come into judgment!

Even them. Keep this in mind when you feel ugly because of your sins… when you know you have been a hypocrite; been judgmental and not forgiving and loving. Confess your sins, listen to Jesus, and believe Him! He came for the ugly, to take them to Himself. Behold: it is they who are His bride! Jesus made an ugly woman His wife!

But, behold what you then receive and become as you listen to Jesus and believe Him. He makes you beautiful! John is shown this very vividly, as he tells us in Rev. 21. ***“Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb,”*** he is told. And then he sees ***“the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.”*** Can it be that we poor sinners truly look so beautiful to our all-seeing and all-knowing God?

Listen to your Lord Jesus. Believe what He says: ***“whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”*** If you believe in Jesus then eternal life is yours *now*. Hearing and believing His words, you receive forgiveness for your every sin. God’s judgment passes, and He no longer sees your sin... *any* of it. Taking you as His bride, Jesus has joined you to Himself in the oneness of marriage. This means that all that is yours – every one of your sins, including your false, sinful judgments – is His. He bound your sins to His body, put them to death on the cross… and then rose to life again without them. And then, all that is His – an eternal life that is eternally holy and pure, filled with the glory of God – He gave to you! For we are His, made one with Him through hearing Him and believing Him… through the marriage of faith.

Oh, that we could see this beauty now, this eternal life that He has given us! Oh, that the beauty that is ours by faith would fill our flesh and our sight now! Make every effort to do so, to make your Jesus visible in your life. Strive to fight against your sinful thoughts and desires and not give in to them, to purify yourself as Christ, your Bridegroom, is pure! God calls you to this through your marriage to Christ.

But also say, ***“O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days.”*** Look ahead! In Christ we are not looking to and preparing for an end, but a beginning… not the decline of health and body, but the fullness of health and life! The apostle John urges us to look forward, to what is coming: ***“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when [Christ] appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”*** Behold, then, the Bride, the wife of the Lamb! See what you will be when He returns from heaven to take us home!

You will be like Jesus was in His resurrection: yourself, a human… but an eternally living and resurrected human, with all that that entails… and especially within. When Jesus returns, He will raise you from the dead and make you a spiritual person; filled with the Holy Spirit and the Spirit’s holiness. Not only will there be no judgment for you in Jesus; no judgment – no suspicious thoughts about others or wrong interpretations of their words and actions; no seeing ugliness instead of beauty – will enter your mind, or anyone else’s mind. ***“Nothing unclean will ever enter [heaven], nor anyone who does what is detestable or false,”*** God’s Word promises (Rev. 22). This is what you have to look forward to in Christ, the beauty that you will see, in yourself and in others, forever!

So: if you wanna be happy for the rest of your life – above all, be blessed for eternal life – let Jesus make you His wife! Listen to Him and believe Him, trusting His promise: ***“whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”*** In His blessed name. Amen.