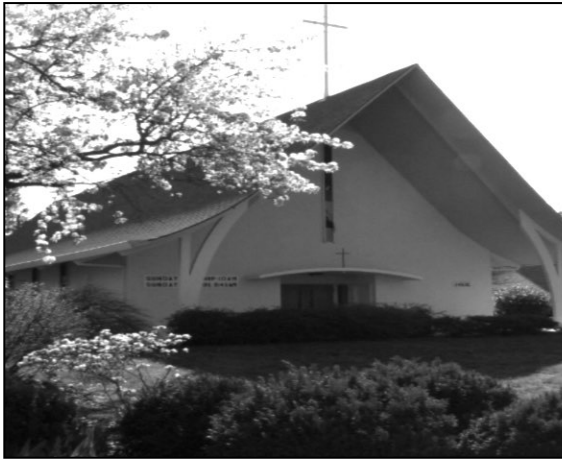




ALL SAINTS' SUNDAY

(PENTECOST 21)

November 2, 2025

St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Portland, OR

THE LESSONS: Daniel 7:1-3,15-18; Psalm 149; Ephesians 1:11-23; Luke 6:20-31

THE SERMON: "WAITING...TO CROSS OVER..."

Grace and Peace to you in the NAME of GOD: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

As we celebrate All Saints Sunday today, I think most people think saints have to be good, pious, perfect Christians. But, I think that the people of St. Timothy know that isn't necessarily true when we share the photos of loved ones today. I know that my Dad was far from perfect, but I do know that he loved the Lord. Knowing that saints aren't perfect reminded me of a joke that Jeff Sanders told me recently about the minister and politician who died and stood in line at the Pearly Gates. St. Peter asked the politician what he did on earth and he answered, "I was a senator." Then, St. Peter took the two men to a huge stately mansion and said to the surprised Senator, "This is your home for eternity." Then, St. Peter took the minister to his eternal home - a small simple studio. Confused and somewhat bewildered, the minister said, "I don't want to seem ungrateful, but I don't understand. I served you faithfully all my life and, yet, I get this tiny home while the politician got a mansion." And, St. Peter replied, "Yes, you don't understand. We get a lot of ministers up here, but that was the first politician who made it to heaven." But, if the politician was anything like some of our so-called leaders, then the politician would probably tear down the mansion and build some ugly gilded monstrosity.

Daniel 7:1-3

But, speaking about ugly monstrosities, what did God want Daniel to see in his crazy dream of the end times and the apocalyptic image of

four ugly terrifying monsters? While most of us think that the book of Daniel was written by Daniel himself in the Second Century before Christ, most scholars have agreed that it was probably composed during the Maccabean rebellion in the Sixth Century BCE but wove many traditional accounts of Daniel's life in Babylonian exile into the Bible. Most scholars think that Daniel's apocalyptic image of these four terrifying beasts actually recalled the fall of four ancient empires: the lion-like beast was Babylon; the bear was the Medean Empire; the leopard, Persia; and most horrifying beast was Alexander the Great's Greece. I learned in my high school World History class that Alexander ushered in a Golden Age of culture but what I wasn't taught was the terrible dark age that came after he died. But, the Jews remembered because, when Alexander was succeeded by the Seleucid Empire, conditions in Israel led to forced Greek influence. Then, after King Antiochus IV Epiphanes instituted many cruel and abhorrent practices, among which was his proclamation that he was a god and, to humiliate the Jews, he sacrificed pigs on the Temple altar which eventually sparked the Maccabean Revolt in 167 BCE. That's what's remembered in the Hanukkah tradition. After Judas Maccabee drove out the Seleucids, the Jewish priests and Levites cleansed the Temple. And, as tradition remembers, the priests only had enough oil to light the Temple for one day. The lighting of the Hannukah menorah is remembering that the one-day supply of oil miraculously lasted of eight days and a rebirth of Judaism resulted. But, as Christmas and Easter have degenerated into times of food and festivity, Hannukah seems to be increasingly losing it's religious significance in modern American expressions of Judaism. But, our lesson reminds us that eventually the four beasts, not only Babylon, Medes, Persia, and Greece but all despotic and oppressive rulers - Rome, the Mongols, Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy - all despotic rulers who resort to power and fear will be destroyed and God's saints will be resurrected to live and bring about God's kingdom.

Ephesians 1:11-23

That's what Paul is trying to teach the Ephesian church. God's saints will rise to show love is more powerful than oppression and fear. Under the cloud of Roman oppression, Paul encourages the Ephesian Christians, "I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love

toward all the saints, and... I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers... so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may perceive what is the hope to which he has called you... and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe..." Despite all the darkness and oppression of the Roman Empire and the persecution by the leaders of Judaism, Paul is asserting that God is in control and proclaims, "In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance... so that we... might live for the praise of his glory... (and) when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation... were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit... to the praise of his glory." God is in control. The beasts of fear and oppression are not more powerful than God!

Luke 6:20-31

That's what Jesus was demonstrating in his ministry. And St. Luke in our lesson remembers Jesus preaching to a crowd on a grassy plain and, after healing many in the multitude, Luke tells us that Jesus looked at his disciples and said, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven... But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now... Woe to you who are laughing now... Woe to you when all speak well of you... But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you... Do to others as you would have them do to you." No wonder people thought Jesus was crazy. Love your enemies? Bless those who curse you? Pray for those who mistreat you? Didn't the Torah, the holy word of God, tell us "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"? But, Jesus knew that there was a commandment that superseded all those levitical laws. Remember that he told a Jewish scholar-priest that God's greatest commandment was to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Love is the basis of God's law. That's what

Jesus meant when he said that he didn't come to destroy God's law but to fulfill it.

Psalm 149, The Call and the Challenge

But, that doesn't sound like the psalm that we just read responsively. Didn't we just read, "Let the praises of God be in their throats and a two-edged sword in their hand, to wreak vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, to bind their kings in chains and their nobles with links of iron, to inflict on them the judgment decreed..."? That sure sounds like an "eye for an eye" to me. But, that wasn't the ancient Jewish understanding which St. Paul reminded the early Roman church, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord." Instead, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Unfortunately, we Western Christians don't understand "vengeance" in the ancient Hebrew sense and that's why we've experienced the Spanish Inquisition, the Thirty Year War in the 17th Century which pitted Catholics against Protestants in central Europe and resulted in an estimate death of four and a half to eight million people being killed. And, today, it seems like some modern-day Jews don't understand "vengeance" in that ancient Hebrew way with what we see happening in Gaza right now. Jesus showed us that God doesn't want us to behave this way. Although it's speculated that Psalm 149 was written by David after some military victory, it had come to be acknowledged in ancient Judaism as God's victory over God's enemies - sin, self-centeredness, greed, oppression, and fear. When we can appreciate this aspect of ancient Hebrew understanding, we will join the Saints in knowing God is in control and, as our hymn proclaims in verse four, "And when steals on the ear the distant triumph song, and hearts are brave again, and arms are strong." We are not alone. God is with us! And, because eternal life is now, we sing and praise God that we are joining a procession of all the saints who by faith rest and by the name of Jesus, are forever blest. (Hymn 422, For All the Saints)