

Title: “Sealed”

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Revelation 7:3

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Service Readings: Rev. 7:2-17; 1 John 3:1-3; Matt 5:1-12

"Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." What comfort this verse brings in any step of our life. God has sealed us through baptism. He has placed His name upon our foreheads and provides us His protection.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

7 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. ²Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, ³saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.”

“Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here. He has risen.” This is what the angel asked the women when they arrived at the tomb of Jesus and I start with this verse because if we are to understand *anything* about the seal of the living God, it is necessary to start with Jesus, the one who *is* the seal. Starting anywhere else is folly. And so we start with him. We start with the clothes of human form that he put on to dwell among us. And we start with the sacrifice that he offered of himself for the sins of mankind. And we start with this resurrection as the proof of death and sin’s defeat. We start there, because without it, without *all of it*, there is no seal available to us, and without a seal, there is *nothing* available to us. Nothing except eternity separated from the Triune God. And so we start with Jesus, for through him we have access to the Father. And the Father seals us. And he calls us his own adopted child. And he invites us into his family. You see, he poured out his cup of wrath upon his own son so that he could pour out his cup of blessings upon us, his adopted children.

But what is this seal that John records in his book? And furthermore, what is it that God is waiting on? Is it the baptism of his children? That is a portion of it, but it is not the whole. For if it were, why do we still sin? And why does he still call us to repentance through his word and sacraments? If baptism were the whole, why would he send the Holy Spirit into our hearts? Baptism, then, is the beginning but not the end.

Now, if baptism is the beginning, we have to ask: the beginning of *what*? What follows our baptism? Well, just as God is the living God, we are the living adopted children of the living God. Adopted through our baptism. And so he calls us into a life where we are molded into an image that resembles Jesus, his perfect son. Each and every day he allows upon us trials and tribulations that, with the help of the Holy Spirit, refine us and strengthen our faith. Being sealed is an active act that has no ending. Being sealed, as one Lutheran Commentary stats, “refers to the ongoing work of the Spirit through God’s Word and Sacraments by which the Christian is kept in faith and protected in godly hope through all the tribulations and sufferings and persecutions illustrated by the four horsemen. No matter how dire the dangers become for the Christian, God will not permit his people to be lost. He will keep them in their faith and hope regardless of what is thrown at them, even death itself.”

On this day we not just celebrate the lives of those who have been sealed and now actively live in the presence of the Father, we also mourn their loss. For although we know where they are and who they are with, we also know where they are not and who they are not with. And *this* is the tribulation of our hearts that is brought into focus this morning. But how are we to respond to these mixed emotions? For we are lying to ourselves if we say that we celebrate their entry into heaven without also acknowledging their absence here on earth. So the question this morning is this: how do we use this day to help instill some semblance of peace in our hearts? And how do we view this day as an opportunity to measure our participation in the ongoing work of God's sealing? I offer you three specific suggestions:

The first, and probably most difficult, is to be in God's Word. We all know this, but *knowing* is not enough. Being sealed means not just knowing but *feeling*. It means *desiring*; it means *thirsting*. Does your heart *thirst* for God's word? If it doesn't, I would offer that you commit to reading God's word regularly. Force yourself to set aside time every single day to open the Bible and let God's Word work on you. I will tell you up front that I fall short in this suggestion. It is difficult, seemingly impossible for me to read God's Word outside of preparing for a sermon or completing seminary homework. So I understand if you struggle with this. But I have renewed my commitment to this and I ask that you consider doing the same. Now, some of you might argue that this sounds like Law, and in some ways it is. But maybe that is what it will take for you and me to form this habit. But here this, as it *becomes* habit, the Holy Spirit will create in us a heart that *thirsts* for God's Word and it will no longer be Law. It will be bread and water for our hearts.

The second thing we can do is related to the first and that is to participate in the Lord's Supper. Again, this might need to start out as Law, but God promises his forgiveness through the body and blood of his risen son. And when we receive it, we receive the living God, in a very real sense. He nourishes us and strengthens us through this meal. We receive the real Jesus, the actual seal that suffered and died for us, and then rose from the grave to give us confidence that sin and death were defeated.

The final exercise suggestion is probably the easiest for most of us but the hardest for everyone else: it is to be in community with one another. Our world tells us that we can "do it alone" and that we don't need anyone beyond ourselves. But that is utterly false. We were made in the image of God and that means we were made to be relational. We were made to lean on each other, to celebrate with each other, to live life with each other. Indeed, the previous two points: being in God's Word and receiving Jesus, are deeply personal! We cannot go through life alone. We cannot go through the trials and the tribulations alone. Doing so can be fatal. I know of a young lady who passed away a few years ago. She struggled with her faith; she struggled with her life. But in the struggle she separated herself from her family and, even more tragic, from the church. She created an island where she could find solace in nothing but herself. And when that wasn't enough, she had nowhere to turn. God became too far away from her, Jesus became unreachable to her, and she had no church family to guide her back. One morning she was found with a rosary in one hand and a gun in the other. I say this not to shock you but to awaken you. This is the risk we face when we believe that the body of believers is not critical for our spiritual and physical health. This is the risk that so many of those we call friends and family face each and every day. This might not be for us, but it is surely for someone we know. And so I urge you, beg you even to stay connected to the church. And I beg you to keep an eye out for those who have disconnected. Bring them back for they need the body of Jesus more than they want to admit.

"Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here. He has risen." This is what I started with and this is what I will end with. He has risen. Our loved ones who we remember this day have not done so yet. But because they have been sealed with the blood of Jesus, we know that one day they will. And we also live confidently in the knowledge that because we have been sealed, we will also be counted among the eternal living. And I beg you this: be active in the refinement of your soul. Be in God's Word: not because you have

to, but because you can't imagine a day *without* doing so. Receive the grace that he offers you in his Word and Sacraments. Not because you have to but because you can't imagine missing an opportunity to do so. And be in community with one another. Maybe not just for yourself, but because others need you for their own strength.

"Why do you seek the living among the dead?" One day we will hear these words spoke of us. But for now, let us prepare for that day.

Please pray with me.

⁹ After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" ¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."