

Sermon Title: Out of the Great Ordeal

Text: [Revelations 7:9-17](#); [Matthew 5:1-12](#)

By: Rev. Terry Carty

Date: 11-06-11

Place: Kingston Springs United Methodist Church

Season: All Saints Sunday

Main Point: The Saints who have gone before us have shown us that the more difficult road is ultimately the better one. We join with them when we take on the Great Ordeal of making the world a better place than we found it.

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Sing *Blest Are They* from TFWS #2155 = [Matthew 5:1-12](#) The Beatitudes

Read [Revelations 7:9-17](#)

I have heard some members of this congregation talk about having dreams about loved ones who have passed away. Vivid dreams. Dreams that have brought them comfort knowing that those persons are doing well and thriving. Some others have not really dreamed, but have felt a presence - a comforting, guiding sense.

While this is not a universal experience, we have probably heard others tell about it. And yet, when we hear a passage from the book of Revelation, it is often disregarded as though it is not a part of the Bible at all. It is so very different from the rest of the New Testament that we just don't know what to do with it.

It is difficult to preach from because it represents John's spiritual experience of the reality of the heavenly kingdom - the kingdom of those who have gone before. It would be like an evening of us telling each other the dreams that we have had about departed loved ones or about angels coming to us in our dream world. These dreams hold truth, but we are not sure how to interpret it for our earthly use.

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The part of this passage from Revelation that I want to focus on is the part where those who are worshipping day and night are the ones who have 'come out of the great ordeal.' (aside: do you think that the great ordeal is an endless Church Council discussion of the budget?) What is this great ordeal in John's dream that requires God to wipe away their tears?

John Wesley's notes say "The Revelation was not written without tears; neither without tears will it be understood." Wesley is putting us on notice that if we are to appreciate the book of Revelation we must be prepared to engage with our emotions as wells with our intellect.

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On All Saints Sunday we remember all our loved ones who have passed, but the Church concentrates our attention on the ones we call 'The Saints,' especially those Christians who marked themselves in life by following the way of Jesus. A clear understanding of the attributes of sainthood, the blessed, is found in the beginning section of the Sermon on the Mount - The Beatitudes. Blessed are the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, those who seek righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers. These attributes are the same as we seek as we try to follow Jesus.

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But apparently these same attributes lead to the 'great ordeal' or better known as the 'great tribulation.' At first it doesn't make sense that saintly living would be an ordeal to be saved from. But let's consider.

In the time of Christ, earthly power belonged to those who had strength to overcome others. The Romans controlled who were fed and who starved, who had houses and who lived outside civilization, who lived and who died. Those who followed Jesus and sought to be peacemakers often found no peace. The life of a saint was difficult.

Today the life of a saint is difficult. It still means living among others in ways that people of power disdain. It usually means going against the majority culture for the good of all people. While we admire modern saints like Mother Teresa and Tammy Unruh, we find it so very difficult to literally live as they have lived. Yet this is the life that we have aspired to when we accepted the vows of baptism or confirmation - vows to resist evil, injustice and oppression, and to put our whole trust in the grace of Jesus Christ even to the point of serving as Christ's representatives in the world.

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The very saints are still speaking to us from that place that John dreamed. They are telling us that it is important to submit to the 'great ordeal' of constantly struggling with our base tendencies to be self-serving. It is rewarding to face oppression from those who discourage us from meekly helping one another and bravely resisting evil.

The saints still speak. As we pause to remember those who have gone before, saints living today and those who have joined the company of heaven, let us remember that we too are called to sainthood. And let us be careful to affirm and encourage one another as we struggle to see ourselves in the Beatitudes. And let each of us take on the 'great ordeal' by making the world a better place than we found it.