

Sunday, November 5, 2017 – All Saints' Day (Observed)
"The List"

Revelation 7: 9-17

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Analogy Structure

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

It's something we've seen far too often in recent years – those ghastly lists. They happen after incidents like October 1st, 9/11, Orlando, San Bernardino and on Halloween in New York. People call hospitals, their loved ones missing – are they there? Impromptu photoboards pop up – on fence lines, on bulletin boards, on Facebook. Some are for the missing – pictures and names and descriptions of what they were wearing – have you seen so and so, if so, please call this number? Some are memorials to the dead, like those crosses by the "Welcome to Las Vegas" sign. Ugh, those ghastly lists.

And so too I could recount the list of various tribulations: Las Vegas, New York and London, Santa Rosa wildfires, Hurricanes Maria and Irma and Harvey, Mexico City earthquakes, Charlottesville... wow, that takes us back less than three months.

We'll be reading a list of our own later today. They're printed for you to pray at home but we say them out loud every week in worship. What list? Our prayer list, of course. We give prayers of thanks for healing and prayers of celebration but let's be honest, most of it is for people who are sick. Today, there's something beyond our weekly prayer list. It's a long list that we read every year in observance of All Saints' Day. Many of you will know many names on that list, near and dear friends who've been part of Mountain View for a long time. Other names will be known only by their relatives, out of town loved ones who have died in the Lord. Perhaps the list feels overwhelming. Or perhaps you've heard too many lists recently and you just feel numb to it all. It can blur after awhile, you know.

If my point were to prove to you that life is hard and full of tribulation, then well, I would rest my case. The suffering can be immense. Amidst disasters that can destroy everything you own, or take down the people you love, or destroy love and unity with each other, you may start to imagine that there is no such thing as safety or security or comfort.

A person could even start to doubt God's love or effectiveness. Maybe you've heard it, "If there really were a loving God, He would not allow such and such." Or "With all this awful

stuff happening, God must really have it out for me.” Or “If you just believed in God more, or trusted Him more, or were more helpful, better things would come your way. What goes around comes around, and you’re getting what you deserve.” You might even imagine that you are separated from the love of Jesus. Tribulation wears on a person.

The problem is, the Bible doesn’t talk that way. In another place, where Paul is speaking to the Roman church about bad stuff that happens, he gives a list of His own. He asks, “Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?” And the answer is a resounding, “No!” Nothing can separate us from the love of Jesus.

Fast forward to our text today. We can make ourselves another list, if we were able to count the faces, but John describes it as a huge crowd that no one could count, from every nation, tribe people and language, standing before Jesus’ throne, wearing white robes and waiving palm branches and singing praises to Jesus who saved them.

And then we find out who they are, on this extraordinarily long list of names that no one can count – these are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. What tribulation? Oh, you know. We might imagine this great tribulation to be something even worse, even more severe than all those ghastly lists and I’m here to tell you today that it’s not something bigger, it’s not something different – you know what the great tribulation is. You live in it every day. You experience the suffering and the pain and the heartache of a world gone mad, infected by a sin-disease, a world full of dying and thrashing and raging. You’re scoured and seared in these tribulations, each in our own way but ultimately meeting the same end. Make no mistake – this tribulation will kill us – whether through violence or accidents or disease or natural disasters, the list of deadly tribulation agents is long, and this tribulation will kill you all, short of Jesus coming first, which I hope and pray happens.

And the good news today – yes, there is good news to, “it will kill us all” – the good news is that for Jesus, that is a big fat, “So what?” So what if it kills us because Jesus makes us alive again. Jesus came into our tribulation, pure and perfect and let Himself suffer the same way we suffer. It killed Him. But Jesus took your sin to the cross and when all the tribulation that unholy list of names, the devil and his angels, the sinsick world and our own sinful flesh threw

everything they could at Him, your sins were hanging on Jesus and He killed them all. More than that, He rose. Jesus kills death. Jesus kills sin. Jesus kills tribulation.

So take all of those lists – the lists of your own sins. The list of every kind of suffering, disease and heartache on our prayer list and natural disaster. The lists of all the tribulations of the past few months. Take even the list of the names of the dead, departed in this past year that we will speak in a few moments, and hear Jesus' answer to that tribulation and His promise to end it once and for all. Hear a description of the vision of our future, of a list so vast that no one can count the names but remember – this is the chapter where you appear in the story. You are part of this scene, "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

That's the list that we're on... now that's a list I can't wait to see with my eyes. In Jesus' name, Amen.