

11/5/23

Revelation 7:9-17

Dreaming of the Possibilities

Do you ever have moments when the many disparate threads that make up the people and events of life entwine and weave themselves together to form this marvelous tapestry or embroidery that when you gaze at it, makes you catch your breath, sit up straight, do a double take, and give thanks to God because of the beauty?!

This happened to me on All Saints' Day this year. I think I've shared with you in the past that All Saints' Day holds special meaning in my heart because it allows us to recall those we've loved and lost. All Saints' Day gives us permission to name loved ones out loud without embarrassment or shame. Let me share what made All Saints' so meaningful and beautiful this year.

On Wednesday, which was All Saints' Day (though we are celebrating it today in church) I attended an All Saints' worship at Darnestown Presbyterian Church. My college friend's son is a voice student at University of Maryland and was the baritone soloist for the service which was centered around the Faure Requiem. The Faure Requiem if you are not familiar with it, is a gorgeous piece of music that I was introduced to in seminary when I sang it with the Princeton Seminary Touring Choir almost 30 years ago. Sitting in that evening service with the haunting and familiar music washing over me, all the events of the week were filling my heart, and I gave thanks to God for the way the Communion of Saints was so real and near weaving this stunning tapestry.

Two Wednesday's ago, I flew to Hartford, CT to mark the one-year anniversary of my father's death. Sharing the day with my sister, brother, and step-mother we named what we missed about Dad, and talked about what we loved, we broke bread together, and of course we played tennis which always made my father happy. We also visited the family grave where my mother, father, and brother Tim are buried. Then, last Saturday I attended a ceremony at Swarthmore College honoring my brother Tim's participation in the 1981 National Tennis Championship. He was too sick to play in the tournament, but he was the captain of the championship team that was being honored. Our family was invited to the ceremony and asked to share some words. My sister had Tim's diary from that year and was able to speak with the Swarthmore tennis team past and present using Tim's own words, offering his genuine delight in receiving the trophy his teammate drove to CT to give to him after the team victory. Tim died one week after receiving that trophy in 1981. Those connections last week with those among the Communion of Saints, my father and brother, were so tender and real. The connection with my mother is that she and I share All Saints' Day as she and I were both ordained into ministry on November 1 though 12 years apart. And now I share the day with my dear Father whose funeral we celebrated on All Saints' weekend last year.

Revelation 7:12 puts it this way, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

It's a song, a prayer, it's an exclamation of joy and a shout out to God who is above all and in all and through all. It expresses the way I felt when I recognized the beauty of the threads coming together at that All Saints' service.

Many of us flee in panic from Revelation. Some of us may try to apply the unusual prophecies, dreams, and visions to today's happenings and to current events. My brother Jay does this with great regularity and he wants to know what I think about his Revelation application. I have a hard time going there.

Instead, I want to invite us to probe, the mood of the passage Tom read from Revelation 7. How does it speak to you today?

What do you think of the great multitude from every nation from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne, & before the lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. What does this evoke? Might these people be known to you? Imagine the multitudes.

Can you hear the crowds singing to God?

What are they saying?

Are they singing the Faure Requiem?

This is a passage from scripture that allows us to dream of the possibilities of what God has in store for us. When I dream of the possibilities personally, I see my family reunited. And it's a gorgeous reunion all six of us together not just the three who remain, and with others as well.

When I dream of the possibilities for our church, I think of what it looks like for us to participate in that vision of hunger no more, of thirst no more, of the sun no longer striking with scorching heat, of God wiping away every tear from sad and despondent faces. What an amazing vision!

Today is Generosity dedication Sunday. On this Sunday we present our financial pledges to the mission and ministry of what God is doing at Potomac Presbyterian Church. This year we are calling on all of us to, "step up for more in 2024." This step-up campaign challenges each one of us to step-up to the next level of giving. On the 2024 Generosity Brochure that was mailed to homes and that the ushers are passing out today to those who need one, you will see there a step-up to giving chart. [Hold up the brochure] It has listed the 93 total giving units and how many giving units are at each financial giving level. The idea of stepping-up for more is for us to move up to the next giving level. Or, if you are not yet on the chart then the idea is to get your pledge on the chart so as to increase the number of total giving units. The step in that situation is to fill out a pledge card.

Last week Chidi and Chinyere Obasi shared with the congregation some relevant scripture passages that help us frame our giving for why we give financially to the church. God loves a cheerful giver. We give the first fruits of our income to God. We are called to care for the

needy. I found those verses so helpful when thinking about generosity toward God and the church. Others have asked me what measure I use for giving and I'll share with you that I use the tithe which means I give 10% of my salary to Potomac Presbyterian Church as a way to say thank you to God for all God has done for me.

Our church community relies on the gifts, tithes, and offerings of each one of us, in order to carry out the mission and ministry. When I think about ***dreaming of the possibilities*** for PPC in the way the author of Revelation 7 dreams about the possibilities that God will bring about: no more hunger, or thirst and all tears being wiped away; I have dreams for our outreach to grow beyond our walls so that we can interact and interface with those who know nothing about Jesus and his love. We will need to replace our organ, that will be through long-term giving not using the operating budget, but that will be down the road. Our Session is dreaming of a pop-up vintage shop here at the church which will further our Earth Care emphasis and engage a greater community beyond our walls. Our dream is for our new director of music and organist, Sam Gray to have the resources he needs to help us spread God's word through meaningful, diverse, and inspiring music.

Two Sundays ago, Cyndy and Paul Mamalian invited you to dream of the possibilities that you would like to see here at the church. They asked, 'what is God putting on your hearts that you know we need to be doing' in order to help bring about the vision as expressed in Revelation 7, or a vision that you know is right for our community?

What do you think of the great multitude from every nation from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne, & before the lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. What does this evoke? Might these people be known to you? Imagine them all.

I imagine they are here today, on All Saints' Day. We will hear their names and count them in our number because that's what happens on All Saints. Those we love and have lost are here with us. In just a bit you will be invited to come forward to receive Communion and then, you are invited to light a candle in remembrance of those you've lost and loved. You may say their names out loud or in silence when you light the candle. We will receive the bread and cup, we will remember the Communion of Saints and we will celebrate the beautiful tapestry or embroidery that we are as God's people.

Listen again to the way in which the author of Revelation is dreaming of the possibilities.

"There was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands."

And then further on in that same chapter ,in Revelation 7--

"They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

These possibilities weave a stunning tapestry for us to imagine. It makes you catch your breath, sit up straight, do a double take, and give thanks to God because of the beauty.

Can you see it?

“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.” (Rev. 7:12)