

Saints/Soldiers Faithful, True and Bold

All Saints' Sunday – 11/05/23 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Psalm 149 Pastor Keith Besel

v.1, [Literal translation from Hebrew,] **“Praise Yahweh! Sing to Yahweh a new song, His praise in the assembly of the saints!”**

v.4, **“For Yahweh is pleased with His people; He beautifies the humble with salvation”.**

Introduction

✘ While Psalm 149 is one of the suggested texts for All Saints' Sunday, I'll be honest, it's not one that has ever caught my interest to this point primarily because of its distinct military flavor. Some have even understood it to be a direct “call to arms” for God's people against those who oppose God and His assembled Church.

→ But that “us versus them” mentality has really taken on such a strong foothold in our current culture that I believe it's time that we now take a look at this important text in God's Holy Word and see how God directs us, as His saints, to remember His believers who have gone before us in the faith, and to learn from them and our Lord how He actually intends for us today to live and interact with those around us in this world as His saints; as His Christian soldiers and people today.

→ Everywhere we turn there seems to be conflict and tension, doesn't there? Politically, in our country it seems like you take your own life into your hands if you simply want to try and have a civil discussion about the issues or candidates. Likewise, we walk around on egg shells whenever topics of race, ethnicity, gender identity, unions, environmental or energy issues come up. Even things you would think should be non-confrontational like food allergies, paint colors for houses in the neighborhood or little league sports teams have proven to now turn so easily into violent confrontations.

→ On top of that we have very real, very deadly wars being waged right now between Russia and Ukraine; between Israel and Hamas that when you get right down to it, are all about who gets to say that they are “right” and the other side is “wrong”.

I. God's Saints/Soldiers, faithful, true, and bold

✘ This time of year is full of zest; vim and vigor for us Lutherans as we spend some time, more directly considering some of these concepts in light of God's Word.

→ Last week we celebrated Reformation Sunday, singing with gusto its battle hymn, “*A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*” and celebrating God's victory over sin, death and the devil in Jesus and the way that He worked at the time of Martin Luther to overcome the tyrants who had corrupted God's Church so that now His people can safely and faithfully confess their salvation in Jesus Christ alone.

→ And moments ago we sang the first half of Ralph Vaughan Williams great hymn, “*For All the Saints*.” It starts off identifying those for whom we praise our God; for “all the saints who from their labors rest”. These are our ancestors in the Christian faith; those who “confessed” “before the world” their exclusive and bold trust in Jesus up to the point of their earthly death. Verse two of that hymn identified them as Christian soldiers whose “captain in the well-fought fight” was the One and only true and triune God.

→ And then verse three makes the shift from the saints who have gone before us into Paradise to you and me right now; the saints that God has gathered together here in His One Holy Christian Church today. Yes, we sang about ourselves; about our role right now in verse three,

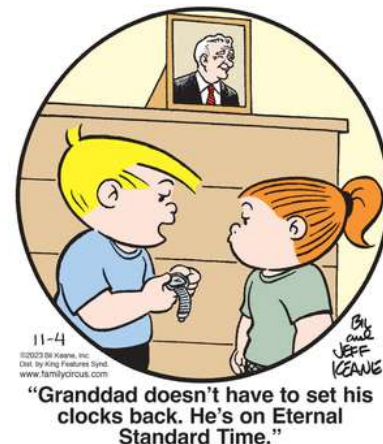
“Oh, may Thy soldiers, faithful, true and bold; Fight as the saints who nobly fought of old; And win with them the Victor’s crown of gold!”

II. Saints Singing a “new song”

- ✘ It might seem out of sync; even odd to think of “saints” as “soldiers”, but if we allow Yahweh, our God to be the one who defines our identity as His people, that’s what His perfect Word teaches us.
 - ➔ And Psalm 149 brings both ideas into one cohesive; one understandable unit. So let’s take a look at this wonderful text.
- ✘ Verses 1-5 paint for us the more common idea of God’s people as His “saints”, that is people who were, like all people, conceived with a sin-filled nature and born into a sin-filled world, yet people whom God, as our “Maker” and “King” (v.2), has now washed and redeemed by the blood of His Son, Jesus to be transformed from sinner into saint; that is one who is now different than the rest of the world; set apart from the way we used to be because of God’s miraculous and saving grace alone!
 - ➔ These are the ones who are charged in verse one to “Sing to Yahweh a new song” and to sing “His praise in the assembly of the saints”.
- ✘ Nine times in Scripture this concept of God’s saints singing a “new song” is brought up. So it must be important for us to understand. What is this “new song”?
 - ➔ Well, for the Bible call it “new”, it must be contrasting it with a song that was “old”. And indeed that’s the case. The “old song” was the Song of Moses in Exodus, chapter 15 that celebrated Yahweh’s saving work of bringing His people out from under the oppression of Pharaoh in Egypt. While that was a major miraculous work of redemption by God, its purpose was only to be a precursor to the much greater saving work of God yet to come. And it is with that ultimate act of salvation, God says that His people are now to sing a “new song”. Revelation 5:8-9 describes the song being sung by the saints in heaven, “And when He (the Lamb, Jesus) had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are You to take the scroll and to open its seals, for You were slain, and by Your blood You ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation’.”
- ✘ This is why verse four of our text says “Yahweh is pleased with His people”, because He’s the one who “beautifies the humble with salvation”.
 - ➔ That’s right, saints are “humble” in that they/we have quickly recognized and confessed not only our original sin, but also the actual sins that we commit every day in disobeying God and His Commandments; in thinking about ourselves before God and in loving so many selfish desires before we love our neighbors around us in this world. In humility God’s saints quickly place themselves under God in all things, understanding that we actually deserve hell, and that it’s only because of His love in Jesus that we instead have His undeserved gift of salvation and joy.
 - ➔ This is the joy described here in this Psalm, “praising His name, dancing, making melody to Him with tambourine and lyre” (v.3); singing, not only publically in a victory procession behind our King, but as verse five says, even “singing for joy on [our] beds” as we go to bed at night; as we lay on our death beds approaching our place in Paradise.
- ✘ This is the part where we join together with our Christian ancestors in worship. Yesterday’s *Family Circus* cartoon showed Billy changing the time on his watch in front of a picture of his

Granddad who must already be with Jesus in Paradise and he says to Dolly, “Granddad doesn’t have to set his clocks back. He’s on Eternal Standard Time”.

→ Regardless of what time our clocks say, you and I as God’s saints in Jesus; all of us here on earth, right along with the “angels, archangels and the entire company of heaven”, including our loved ones who have gone before us and are with Jesus in Paradise right now; everyone of us gathered together by God in His name, absolutely “sings to Yahweh the new song” of praise and salvation with which God has already robed us in Jesus, and in Jesus alone!



III. Soldiers – our marching orders

✘ But friends, our lives as Gods’ people is not just about singing that “new song” here in the safety of these four walls with our beloved Christian saints sitting next to us in these pews. For the second half of Psalm 149, verses 6-9, gives us our marching orders as Yahweh’s Christian soldiers while we still remain here on this earth.

→ The entire section is written as a strong exhortation; a bold call to action, “Let the high praises of God be in their throats and two-edged swords in their hands, to execute vengeance on the nations and punishments on the peoples, to bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron, to execute on them the judgment written! This is honor for all His saints. Praise Yahweh!”

✘ Woe, does that mean what it sounds like? Is this God calling us believers to violence; to some kind of crusade-like war against all unbelievers? Sadly, in history there have been some who have actually used these words in Psalm 149 that way.

→ In Luther’s time, Thomas Münzer used these verses to ignite the Peasants’ “War, urging the peasants to rise up and kill their masters to bring in God’s kingdom. And a few generations later, Caspar Scloppius used the same text in the Thirty Years’ War to urge Roman Catholics to violently overthrow the Lutheran princes.

✘ So here’s where we take our cue from the saints who have gone before us; the ones we sang of earlier in verse 3 of that great All Saints hymn, “Oh, may Thy soldiers, faithful, true, and bold” – that’s us, “Fight as the saints who nobly fought of old; And win with them the Victor’s crown of gold!”

→ How did they do it, those who “nobly fought of old”? It was not by taking up a war-cry and running into jihad. That’s not how our Lord describes them in today’s Gospel Reading either? No, they are described as “the poor in spirit... those who mourn... the meek... those who hunger and thirst for righteousness... the merciful... the pure in heart... the peacemakers... those who are persecuted...” and the ones “who are reviled...on [Jesus’] account.” (Matthew 5:1-11).

→ And St. John wrote in today’s Epistle Reading, “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared” (1 Jn. 3:2). Perhaps that highlights best the disconnect of our struggle while we remain here on earth. Too often, we are not content to be God’s children now. No, we want to be what has not yet appeared. We want to seize the kingdom of heaven. We want to inherit the earth. We want our satisfaction. We want to act out verses 7-9 of our text in the goriest of ways right now. We want to execute judgment and vengeance upon the nations; we want to be the ones to bind the kings in chains! Though we know we shouldn’t, there are times we might actually want to be a Bible-thumping believer or a down and dirty doctrine wielding confessionalist.

✘ But here's the deal – and I need every one of you to hear me well on this: the victory that God is talking about in Psalm 149, my dear Christians, cannot be won by our fight. You and I do not win the crown of gold by our faithful, true, and bold fighting. No, the crown has been won for us by Jesus. His fierce fighting was displayed in His perfect humility. In meekness, purity, and mercy He won the everlasting day for us and the entire assembly of His “saints”.

➔ The way of fighting that He has shown to us is unorthodox to be sure; completely against our human nature. It doesn't make sense that we fight for victory with our hands folded; that we are to be fierce in battle while staying on our knees. How can we win an argument by confessing our sins, or convert the unbeliever next door with a word of forgiveness?

✘ Yet, that's how Jesus won the victory over your sinful nature. It's with the sweet and gentle promise of the Gospel that He converted your hard and stony heart.

➔ In fact, the two-edged sword He wants to see in our hands now is the “Word of God” that Hebrews 4:12 says is, “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

➔ Yes, it is not some cold piece of steel, but God's Word of Law that cut through every deception we and the world could concoct, to expose our sin. And it is only the Word of His Gospel through the shedding of Jesus' blood that removed that sin permanently from our souls, along with the power of death and the devil, so that our now sainted-throats indeed proclaim “the high praises of God” (v.6) in purity and truth; in humility and love to all nations and peoples and kings and nobles around the world until the day when we too are honored in grace to enter before our Savior's throne in Paradise, always singing to Yahweh the “new song” of Jesus as His saints; as His soldiers, “faithful, true and bold” forevermore. Amen.