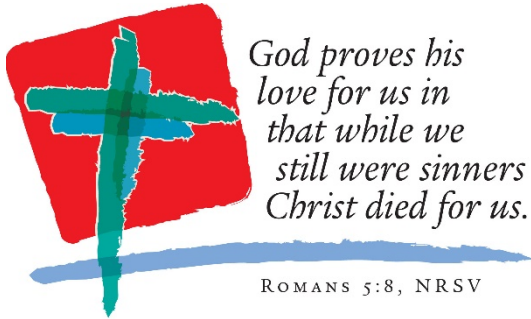


VICTORY - SIMULTANEOUSLY SINNER AND SAINT



You either remember or have heard the famous introduction to ABC's Wide World of Sports: "The thrill of victory and the agony of defeat." We can relate to the vastly different experience of one or the other. but certainly not both at the same time. Webster's dictionary defines the word "simultaneous" as "at the same time." Martin Luther proclaimed, "Simul Justus et

Peccator." We are at the same time both sinner and righteous. Not a single one of us is without sin. We are not only conceived in sin but we commit sins of thought, word and deed, of commission and omission. That's why so many people rightly balk about being called a "saint." But that's because they don't know the Gospel. God proves His love in that while we were sinners (at the same time) Christ died for the sinner.

The Law confirms that we all fall short of perfection as God demands. The Gospel proclaims that by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone as revealed in Scripture alone, the believer in Christ is reconciled to God, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb and justified (just as if I never sinned) before the judgement seat of God - not on the basis of what we have done or not done but solely on the basis of what has already been accomplished by Jesus through His life, death and resurrection. Or in a word: **VICTORY**. This side of heaven, we experience the agony of defeat (sin) and the thrill of victory (grace) simultaneously. And as simultaneous sinner saints, we have what it takes to make this truth relevant/real to the world around us. **Read this article** to "rejoice and be glad" in the victory that is yours to share with the world.

What is your definition of a "saint"?

All definitions are not the same - especially as it relates to being saints. The most common definition is a particularly virtuous person meriting a superior status. We may comment that he or she is a saint because they have done this or that. My wife is often referred to as a saint for putting up with me. Therefore, we know that definition can't be the right one, right?!

The Roman Catholic Church is known for officially recognizing and honoring (canonizing) someone because his or her life was a *perfect* example of the way Christians should live. They even suggest that one should pray to a saint as intercession before God. Even though many of our churches and hospitals are named after the recognized saints, we must confess that only One person has ever been perfect - Jesus Christ Himself.

According to God's Word, we cannot do anything to make ourselves saints. A person is made a saint solely by having their sin imputed to Jesus and His perfect righteousness imputed to the person thus making them a saint. God is simultaneously Judge/Just and Justifier/Reconciler.

God doesn't tolerate sin. He fully punishes sin - but that wrath and judgement is placed upon Jesus on the Cross and in His resurrection, we bear the newness of life. As believers (saints), our sin goes to Jesus and His righteousness comes to us: **VICTORY!** Thanks be to God that we are made saints through the blood of Jesus rather than it depending upon our lives. *"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:8-9).

A common accusation against believers in Jesus, the Church and saints in general is that they are hypocrites. A person who acts in contradiction to his or her stated beliefs. A person who puts on a false appearance of virtue and perfection. The believer doesn't hide behind the cross of Jesus to give a false impression but rather clings to the grace that the Cross of Jesus solely provides. Yes, the Church is full of sinners but by the grace of God, it's full of saints now. The accusation by the world that the Church is full of hypocrites gives us a point of connection to boldly proclaim that the Church doesn't proclaim the absence of sin but the forgiveness of sin.

Saints are the beautiful transformation found in the gracious hands of God.

You have probably heard of the Italian violin maker, Stradivarius. His violins are now the most prized violins ever made because of the rich and resonating sound they produce. The unique sound of a Stradivarius violin cannot be duplicated. But what may surprise you is these precious instruments were not made from treasured pieces of wood; they were carved from discarded lumber. Stradivarius was very poor and could not afford fine materials like his contemporaries. So he garnered most of his wood from the dirty harbors where he lived. He would take those waterlogged pieces of wood to his shop and clean them up, dry them out, and from those trashed pieces of lumber he would create instruments of rare beauty.

It has since been discovered that while that wood floated in those dirty harbors, microbes went into the wood and ate out the center of those cells. This left just a fibrous infrastructure of the wood that created resonating chambers for the music. From wood that nobody wanted, Stradivarius produced violins that now everybody wants. Just as this poor violin maker transformed trash into treasure, only God transforms a sinner into a saint. Only God takes the believer from being worthless to making us heirs of heaven itself. This is done at one's Baptism where we are joined to Christ's death and resurrection dying to sin and being raised to new life. The glorious transformation is an act of God alone but He shares this victory for us to live in NOW and for ETERNITY. *"God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8). **While at the same time sinners, Christ lavished His love upon us to make us His saints. How awesome is that!!**

In the hymn that is often sung for the celebration of All Saints' Day, *"For All the Saints, LSB #677"*, there is a transition when it comes to verses 4-6. My heart often beats rapidly with anticipation and my eyes well up as I sing, "Oh, blest communion, fellowship divine! **We feebly**

struggle, they in glory shine; Yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine.” Every one of us is acutely aware of the struggles and challenges in this sinful world. I think the past 18 months has brought more of this to light with the turmoil of death and disease, of fear and anxiety, of financial burdens, protests, violence, and the list goes on and on. To say that we feebly struggle is putting it mildly. *“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies” (2 Corinthians 4:8-10).* Sounds like our feeble struggles, doesn't it?!

But thanks be to God, there's so much more in store for the believer. My mother was a Sunday school teacher for over 30 years. She had her own way of making the profound seem rather simple. At home, she would play *“I'm But a Stranger Here”* with such vigor. When she was done playing, she would turn to all those in the room and say, “That's what I'm living for.” When she contracted cancer and was put in hospice, she took the time to write all those she knew to tell them “so long for now, but I'll look forward to the time when we will meet again at the feet of Jesus.” She also linked together for me these two truths when at dinner she would say, “Keep your fork. The best is yet to come. Heaven is our home.” As much as I would love to eat dessert first, she made the transformation to living as sinner/saint so real. The Christian funeral, although filled with such sorrow and tears because we love, is the proclamation that “with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify His glorious name” because there is no more feeble struggle but only **VICTORY** because there is no more hunger or thirst, or pain or tears, or fear and uncertainty - in this hope, we rejoice and are glad NOW and for ETERNITY.

A question that pastors are asked quite frequently is: “Will we know each other when we get to heaven?” The Scriptures for the celebration of All Saints' Day gives us the answer: we won't really know each other UNTIL we get to heaven. “Those in white robes” are the ones who have been redeemed in the blood of the Lamb to be who **God really intended them to be.** Jesus explains in His Sermon on the Mount that we have been called to that “different life” as His holy, set apart people, as His saints now. The saints of God celebrate God's eternal victory BEFORE there is a new heaven and a new earth, BEFORE there is a new Jerusalem coming down out of the sky, BEFORE there is a river of life flowing from the throne of God. **The people of God celebrate VICTORY as if it has already happened, for indeed, for the sinner/saint it has.**

Victory is what All Saints' Day is about!

Envision this: 800 special athletes came to participate in games designed just for them. The events started with a parade of athletes; 800 young men and women made their way around the track, banners held high and flags waving. Some of them limped, some had braces on their legs and used crutches to walk. Others had arms that dangled by their sides. Some were in wheelchairs and had to be pushed to participate. When their trip around the field was complete, everyone looked down to the right corner for the entry of the Olympic torch. A young man

named Joel entered the stadium and began to run around the track with the torch held high. The harder he ran the more difficult it was for him. He struggled up the steps to the Olympic flame, refusing help along the way. When he reached the top, he thrust his torch into the air as high as it would go, and the flame was lit.

As the spectacle unfolds, one word comes to mind: **VICTORY**. Victory had already been won. Before the games started, before the first race was run, before any of them grew too weak and tired to finish the race, before anyone finished last - victory had been won. Victory was on their faces, in their voices, in their hearts and in their daily lives. Eight hundred special athletes - maimed, crippled, disabled - and yet they stood and cheered Joel. Why? Because, regardless of any outcome of the games, they had already won.

How can we be sure of this victory in spite of our circumstances as we still feebly struggle on this earth as sinner/saints? **Just look at the scars.** The nail-imposed scars on the hands and feet of Jesus are all the proof we need. The story is told of a small, orphaned boy who lived with his grandmother. One night the house caught fire while the boy was sleeping upstairs. A crowd gathered around the blazing house, and the boy's screams could be heard above the crackling of the blaze, but no one seemed to know how to help. Suddenly a stranger rushed through the crowd and circled to the back of the house where he spotted an iron pipe attached to the house that extended to the second floor. Hand over hand, he climbed the steaming hot pipe, he reached the upstairs window, disappeared for a few moments, and then reappeared with the boy in his arms. Amid the cheers of the crowd, he climbed down the pipe with the boy around his neck. Unfortunately, the grandmother did not survive the fire.

Weeks later, a public hearing was held in the town hall to determine in whose custody the orphaned boy would be placed. Certain people stepped forward to state their case for guardianship. The first man said, "I have a huge farm. Every boy loves the outdoors." A woman spoke up, "I'm a teacher. I have a huge library. The boy would receive a good education." A housewife came forward saying, "I am home every day and can offer him stability." Finally, the richest man in town spoke, "I'm wealthy. I could give the boy everything mentioned so far: farm, education, stability, and plenty besides. I should have him." The chairman asked, "Would anyone else like to prove why they should have custody of the boy?" From the rear a stranger walked forward with his hands in his pockets. Slowly he revealed the badly scarred hands he had received from climbing the scalding pipe to save the boy. With a leap, the boy threw his arms around the stranger's neck and held on for dear life. With that, everyone departed, leaving the boy alone with his rescuer who had won his custody without a word. It is the scarred, nail-pierced hands of Jesus Christ that speak louder than words to prove that we are His for eternity. It is those scarred hands that allow us to confess: "...***Surely this is our God; we trusted in Him and He saved us...***" (*Isaiah 25:9*).

How can you be certain of this victory amidst so much uncertainty in our world? **Just look at the empty tomb.** The victory was won on that first Easter day. The stone was rolled away;

the tomb was empty; He was not there; He was risen. On that resurrection day, God, through His Son, proclaimed victory forever and nothing can change it. Nothing can ever set it aside. Why is that so important for us to know, believe and trust the promise of Revelation and the truth of Easter? It is important for you to know and trust so that when you run the race of life, when you stumble and fall, when you are hurt or injured, when things don't work out and you finish last, you still know that you are not defeated. You are not defeated for, regardless of the outcome or course of human events, the one victory that really counts, that is above every victory is already yours.

You're still not convinced? **Just look at the white robes.** The Lord lets us take a peek at His plan for us - a plan for abundant life. Look – it's our loved ones who have come out of great tribulation; their robes have been made clean - no more hunger, thirst, pain, tears, cancer, struggle – it's them and they rest in the Lamb because of His life-giving blood.

John Quincy Adams, when he was very old, endured a bad winter. He was in bed for months. When spring came, he was determined to go for a walk and, with the aid of a cane, he made his way down the street. A friend passing by said, "Well, tell me, how is John Adams today?" He replied: "If you're asking about this old house in which John Adams lives, I can tell you it is in pretty bad shape - the windows are broken out, the roof is caving in, I can't remember anything anymore. The foundations are weak and any ole' wind causes this old house of a body to shake and tremble. No doubt the tenant will be moving out soon. But, if you're asking me about John Adams himself, then I can tell you he's alright and will be for a thousand years from now." **Did you hear it?** Did you hear what victory sounds like? It's victory, come what may, before we lose that job, before the heart attack, before the operation, before the sorrow of grief, before the failure with children or spouse or self, before those feelings get hurt, before we wonder if we will ever smile again. Before any of that, the faith in our hearts cry out: **VICTORY!**

Sinner/Saints are those who let the victory of Jesus shine through - NOW!

One Sunday as they drove home from church, a little girl turned to her mother and said, "Mommy, there's something about the pastor's message this morning that I don't understand." The mother said, "Oh? What is that?" The little girl replied, "Well, he said that God is bigger than we are. He said God is so big that He holds the whole world in His hand. Is that true?" The mother replied, "Yes, that's true, honey." "But Mommy, he also said that God comes to live inside of us when we believe in Jesus as our Savior. Is that true, too?" Again, the mother assured her daughter that what the pastor had said was true. With a puzzled look on her face the little girl then asked, "If God is bigger than us but He also lives inside us, wouldn't He just have to show through?"

It has been said that the saints of God - those who believe in Jesus and have been washed in the blood of the Lamb - **are those who make it easier for us to believe in God.** God shows through them. *"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called*

children of God; and so we are” (1 John 3:1). As children of God, heirs of salvation, sinner/saints, we have a calling to let God shine through us to boldly proclaim that you are a sinner/saint, simultaneously a redeemed sinner and saint by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone as revealed in Scripture alone. That truth just never grows old or less important.

Have you ever tried to imagine what and who John saw in that heavenly crowd? I have often imagined that among the people he saw in this vision were his friends, his fellow apostles, who had been martyred – Peter, his brother James, Matthew, Andrew, Philip, and Stephen, the very first Christian martyr. He may have seen those who persecuted the disciples but who were changed by the Gospel - including Saul/Paul. He probably saw neighbors who he shared the love of Jesus with. How comforting this vision must have then been to him. To see his friends now safe. To see their suffering turned into joy. To see Jesus, the Lamb upon His throne, with His own gathered around Him. All His promises made, fulfilled in all its glory.

But he also witnessed the very reason we are on this earth. We are to celebrate the victory that is found in Christ alone and to share this truth until it can be shared no longer. We are sent into this dark world with the light of victory. The world stands before us and shouts hate, but God proclaims love. The world shouts doubt, but God proclaims faith. The world shouts defeat, but God gives out a call to victory. We live in a world accustomed to defeat. People all around us have made peace with gloom as if despair was their only choice. It isn't. We know for sure it isn't. The scars on Christ's hands, the empty tomb and those in white robes call us to victory. The Holy Spirit equips and empowers us as sinner/saints for witness.

This side of heaven, we experience the agony of defeat (sin) and the thrill of victory (grace) simultaneously. And as simultaneous sinner/saints, we have what it takes to make this truth relevant/real to the world around us. The Evangelization Team is hoping and praying that this article in some way inspires you to live in the victory that is yours already now but, simultaneously with the lavished love of Jesus, to urgently share this victory with a world living in the despair of defeat. YOU know the reality of life's feeble struggles but you “rejoice and are glad” that there is far more to come (keep your fork) as saints now and for eternity. If we can help further equip YOU in any way to share this victory, reach out to: evangelizationteam@englishdistrict.org We are so blessed to witness together of Jesus as sinner/saints in a world that will feebly struggle until the Lord returns. But thanks be to God for the VICTORY that is found in Christ Jesus.

In Christ Alone,
Pastor John Diener
Galatians 2:20