

"The Saints Go Marching In." – November 5, 2017
by Wayne J. Schneider – Veni Spiritu Sancto

The Saints Go Marching In Revelation 21:1-6a

You may be familiar with the New Orleans Saints football team, but today is "All Saints Sunday! On this day we honor and remember all those who have died. And, we are reminded who and whose, we are.

Each Sunday we light the Christ Candle; and on the First Sunday of Advent, the first Sunday in the new church year, we initiate a new candle. This year, I have decided to move up the day, in honor of those who have gone on before us. Today, the Christ Candle becomes the Paschal Candle. Usually, the Pascal candle is lighted at baptisms and funerals, to remind us of the death and resurrection of Jesus. At a baptism service, the water tells us that we are brought together in hope by Jesus Christ. Seeing the candle lighted at a funeral, we recall the promise of resurrection to eternal life.

Our church's new Christ Candle has the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet: the Alpha and the Omega. In the book of the Revelation, we read "*It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.*" (21:6a) It is formidable that the Paschal candle is lit at the beginning of our physical journey and then, at it's finish.

Today, we lament the loss of family and friends who have died. But, death is more than the loss of physical life. We experience loss through broken relationships, the need for forgiveness, addiction, anger, bitterness, and so on.

I often need to remind myself that God has not stopped creating. God continues making all things wonderfully and powerfully new. And, I speak not just about life after death but right here, right now. In the middle of our brokenness,

our frustration, our anxiety, and our pain, in the chaos of this world, God transforms all things.

In our baptism, we are 'buried with Jesus,' and resurrected to a new life. Our sin is eradicated, and we are called children of God, in the midst of our culture's. We enact this promise as the cross is made on our foreheads in the sacrament of baptism.

As you already knew, but because I am a slow learner, there are thousands of things I wish I had done differently as a parent. One thing I failed to say, and I am crushed that I did not say it when our two sons and our daughter were young, I did not tell them daily, "You are a beloved child of God."

One of my pastor friends from the "Clergy Cluster" I attend monthly in Chehalis, told me that one Saturday, when she was under pressure to complete her sermon, she barked at her young son, the one who had refused to take a nap and then, to go to bed at night. When she realized what she had done, she called her son to her lap, and through tears, apologized, and told him she was sorry. This child looked up at his mother and, without a word, took his tiny finger and made a cross on his mother's forehead.

This is a sign of forgiveness and grace. It is so powerful words are unnecessary. The cross reminded that mother that she is a beloved child of God. It calls us to remember that if we mess up, and we will, again and again, the cross is still on our forehead. The unconditional love of God is both on us and in us.

Life in this world is complicated. These are tough times, indeed. Each of us experience, as Martin Luther once said, the 'little deaths;' through heartaches, pain, and sorrow. We need to call to mind the promises of God in the chaos and craziness of our time. Perhaps we need to remind ourselves and our friends, that we are God's beloved children in life and death.

Even though we are rushing toward the Season of Advent and not the Season of Lent, I urge you to make the sign of the cross on your forehead, or on the person seated next to you, or on the forehead of someone at your home. Do this to remind yourself that God has redeemed you through Jesus Christ and that you belong to God.

And, even if you think it is not possible for you to be entitled to be 'a child of God,' do it anyway: because you already are! You are loved, covered by grace, by an amazing God who continues to 'make all things new.'" And THAT, my friends, is Good News. Alleluia. Amen.