

Hebrews 12:1

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us...”

Revelation 7: 9-12

⁹ After this I looked, and 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. ¹⁰ They cried out in a loud voice, saying,

“Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

¹¹ And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² singing, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

Trinity Presbyterian Church November 5, 2017—All Saints Day

Sermon Song: “The Word on Our Lips”

[**Worship Note:** Today’s sermon song is based on the song “Hallelujah,” which was written by Leonard Cohen. The song has been performed by many artists in a variety of styles. Leonard Cohen had written eighty verses to this single song--almost one verse for each year of his life. He died on November 7, 2016 at the age of eighty-three.]

Once attended a funeral of a dear friend. He was both a mentor and a true saint. He had been sick a long time and finally lost the battle to cancer. Before he died he requested that at his funeral, as his cremated ashes were being carried down the center aisle, everyone was to sing a hymn of praise to God. I suppose it fit how he lived his life. After all, just before he slipped away—when he was asked if he had any final words to say—he simply closed his eyes, as tears streamed down his cheeks, and he uttered these four syllables:

Refrain: Hal-le-lu-jah, Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah.

What gives us the strength to say the word? How is it that after all we’ve been through in our lives, all the losses we’ve endured and all the struggles we’ve faced, we still have the audacity to proclaim “Hallelujah”—Praise be to God? How can the Psalmist write that all of creation sings praises to God the Creator, after all the abuse she has endured at the hands of those who God created in God’s image? How can the psalmist in one moment lament with a wide-open chest, “Why have you abandoned me?” and then a few verses later say, “I will praise you!”? How is it the choir we read about robed in white and singing around the throne of God, offers their worship and praise after being persecuted, oppressed and tormented for their faith? I mean, it doesn’t make any sense. In the moments we feel isolated and alone; in the moments when our loved ones are taken away. When we are sick and suffering, and the doctors don’t have any

answers. In the very moments when we feel betrayed by God, how is it that the word can still enter our mouths and fall from our lips? Hallelujah. Praise be to God...

Verse 1:

You say I said the word in vain
I don't even know the same
But if I did, well really, what's it to you?
There's a blaze of light in every word
It doesn't matter what you heard
The holy and the broken {Am} Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah.

Maybe. Just maybe. We find ourselves singing Hallelujah because something deep in us knows that even though we struggle, we are never alone. There is a great cloud of witnesses that surrounds us! I mean, how many times have we heard someone tell us that they could actually feel our prayers? Or that a voice told them that things were going to be okay? A few years ago, as I was making my rounds at a hospital, I stood beside a woman who was saying goodbye to her husband. As she stood there weeping and gently brushing his hand, she told me that she had this warm, yet strange comfort because she could feel the presence of all the saints who had gone before him surrounding him as if waiting to receive him home. Now I don't want to sound like I know this for sure, but there seems to be these moments when the veil between this world and the next get a bit thinner and somehow, we can feel the presence of the saints with us. Perhaps we can even hear the choir of the saints off in the distance singing. *[choir begins humming refrain]*

Listen, can you hear them? *[Choir begins singing refrain quietly "Hallelujah"]*

Verse 2:

I did my best, it wasn't much
I couldn't feel, so I tried to touch
I've told the truth, I didn't come to fool you
And even though it all went wrong
I'll stand before the Lord of Song
With nothing on my tongue but Hallelujah
[Choir joins] Hallelujah, Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelu.
Hallelujah, Hallelujah
Hallelujah, {*Choir stops*}
Hallelujah

So listen closely *[choir hums through chorus 3x]*. We are surrounded by the saints who know what it is like to get weary and tired. Who know the bitter taste of loss and injustice. Who understand what it means to struggle with faith and life. And yet, they are the ones who have somehow even on the darkest of nights stood up to proclaim, "I believe."

I believe in the God of justice.
I believe in the God of mercy.
I believe in the God of all people and nations.
I believe in the God who promises that one day,
one day we will hunger and thirst no more,
and every tear will be wiped away from our eyes.
I believe in the God who promises
that we are never, ever alone.

Perhaps it is why we are here today, why we dedicate our gifts and offer ourselves. Because something deep within us hopes. And maybe, just maybe, it is why that even as we breathe our final breaths, we can't help but utter these four syllables: Hal-le-lu-jah.