

“Eternal Healing”

Revelation 22:1-5 & Hebrew 11:40 - 12:3

Pastor James York

October 31, 2021

Prayer for Understanding Loving God fill us with your Spirit, your breath, your abundant life. Open our eyes to beauty, our ears to harmony, our hearts to love our minds to wisdom and our souls to joy. Speak to us through your love letter to us the Bible and through one another. Amen

There is a spot at Willow River State Park where you can sit on a flat rock beside the crystal-clear river. A few yards upstream the water playfully dances and sings as it cascades through a small rapids. There is the sensation of the warm sun and cool mist from the river. Vibrant blue birds add their voice to the orchestra of the river. The aroma is robust, earthly, life, abundant growth, refreshing vapor. White birch stretch their limbs to the sky clothed in flicker yellow, majestic maples joyfully serenade adorned with effervescent orange, sumacs bow and wave their fiery red. Trees show us that letting go is beautiful. Twenty-two days ago, when I was there, I suddenly felt like I was floating on a gentle breeze. Every sense was dazzled with delight. My Dad was there with me. I didn't hear him talk, yet he expressed his love. I didn't see him, yet my mind's eye delighted in his smile. Together we savored the beauty. Time vanished. All was glorious.

Scripture describes heaven. **Revelation 22:1-5 “Then the angel showed me a river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. It flowed down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations. No longer will there be a curse upon anything. For the throne of God and of the Lamb will be there, and God’s servants will worship God. And they will see God’s face their foreheads mirroring God. And there will be no night there—no need for lamps or sun—for the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign forever and ever.”**

Living water abundantly flowing, quenching every thirst. Delicious fresh fruit satisfying every hunger. Radiant light infusing glory into everyone causing everyone to shine. All will love, rejoice, and celebrate for eternity. Leaves that heal enabling us to fully let go of every burden, pain, hurt, regret, and tear. Leaves that heal filling us with peace. Leaves that heal clapping joy into our essence. Leaves that heal reviving every love to be savored again and forever.

Scripture declares, **Hebrews 12:1 “We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.”** Today is All Saints Sunday when we imagine all people healed, shining, glorified, and rejoicing forever.

You are a saint by God's grace. God's goodness makes you a saint. God chooses to see us through the amazing grace filter that removes all of our sin and purifies us. Each of us is a work in progress. God sees each of us as a finished, masterpiece. So, whether in heaven or on earth all people are saints. We are not celebrating some saints Sunday we are celebrating *All Saints Sunday*.

Sin gives the illusion that we are separated from God. God is always with us. God always loves us. Sin causes separation between people. Perhaps the most difficult aspect of sin is death, the illusion that we are separated from someone who has been resurrected.

We are all united by the Holy Spirit. We are all beloved members of the community of saints. John Calvin explained that when he celebrated the Lord's Supper, he perceived the saints in heaven. Over the years, I have had numerous people explain how they felt the resurrected love them while celebrating holy communion. I have perceived my parents when I play in nature and occasionally in a dream. Sometimes a song, taste, smell, sight, photo will enable us to share love with those on the other side of the portal of death. Perhaps loving memories emerge in us when the one we shared that loving moment is reliving and savoring it in heaven. God does not lose anyone or anything. Everyone is resurrected. Those you love who have died are cheering for you from heaven. They will soar with Jesus to greet you and usher you into heaven at your death. Every love, joy, delight, wonder, and goodness is resurrected and awaiting you in heaven.

Southern Baptist preacher Carlyle Marney used the image of a "balcony" for the cloud of witnesses cheering us on. Carlyle used to say that “your personhood, your personality, persona, is like a house, and it's a fairly elaborate and complex structure. Some are fancy. Some are sophisticated. Some are simple and functional. Some are grandiose. Some are modest. Each has a number of rooms: a formal parlor for greeting guests, a family room, bedroom, kitchen. Each of us has in the structure of our persona a basement where the plumbing is located, and the trash is stored. NO need to spend your life down there, Carlyle used to say. Everybody has a basement. Come on up into the sunshine. Sometimes we act as if the plumbing and trash bin are all there is to us, Carlyle observed. And if you come upstairs and step outside

onto the lawn and look up, you will see that the house that is you has a spacious, gracious balcony. There are people up there on your balcony. Carlyle was a Southerner, so his balcony was white wrought iron with wicker rocking chairs. There are people in the rocking chairs on your balcony sipping iced tea or bourbon, depending on whether you are a Baptist or Presbyterian, Carlyle used to say. The people on your balcony are the strong, positive influences in your life. Your heroes. Your models and mentors. Your parents, grandparents and a sibling may already be up there. There are some folk up there you never met but they influenced and helped shape you and there are some really big names up there: people whose lives inspired you from afar and called deeper faith out of you and courage and stamina and love and discipline. The people on your balcony are your cloud of witnesses cheering you on. Every so often take time to look up and greet them. Call the roll. Name them. Wave to them. Your saints -- your dear ones -- the great ones and small ones: your mother and father maybe, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, your old coach, your piano teacher."

The people on your balcony see you through the amazing grace filter. There is no sadness or pain in heaven. The people on your balcony see all the love you are receiving and sharing, and they see how that love expands for eternity. One of the wonders of heaven is perceiving how the love we shared exponentially grows for eternity.

The author of Hebrews says, **"I could go on and on,"** listing the faithful people on your balcony, **"But I have run out of time."** A few verses later Hebrews states, **"God had a better plan for us that their faith and our faith would come together to make one complete whole, their lives of faith not complete apart from ours."** This is such a wonderful truth for everyone who has had someone die that they love. When someone we love dies, there is a void in our life, an incompleteness. They are in our balcony cheering us on until we join them in heaven and are once again united with them. Then we will be in the balconies of the people we love that are still on earth until they unite with us in heaven. This will continue until all are welcomed home in one complete whole, one perfect loving community. What a wonderful and joyous feeling it will be to hug, talk, listen, laugh, play, and share with those we love again and forever.

Another exciting aspect of this truth is we are not even aware of most of our incompleteness. There are people in your balcony that you have never met but love you deeply. People who if they would have lived on earth with you at the same time in history in a similar area of the globe you would have been close friends with. When we go home to heaven, we will be united with all of them. We will complete one another. Imagine them celebrating the faithful aspects of your life. Family and friends beaming as they talk of the ways you shared love.

On my balcony I hear my mom cheering for me with her tenacity, to keep going, to persevere no matter the setback. My dad imparts gentle, patient wisdom. Grandpa Cheney encourages me to strive for excellence. Grandma Cheney urges me to explore, be wild and carefree. Grandpa York quietly walks a step behind me whispering affirmations. My sister-in-law Miranda helps me with creative writing. Reverend Everhard shows me how to laugh and smile. John Calvin keeps telling me to show grace and preach grace.

We are going to celebrate *All Saints Sunday* by hopefully connecting with people in heaven. You may not be able to connect if this is you, that is ok, then simply enjoy the process and the silence. Be aware of your breathing. Breathe in love. Breathe out burdens. Breathe in love. Breathe out regrets. Breathe in love. Breathe out your to do list. Breathe in peace. Breathe out fear. Breathe in joy. Breathe out sadness. Breathe in wonder. Breathe out expectations. Breathe in community. Breathe out separation. Let go. When thoughts come into your mind, acknowledge them, and then visualize placing them aside. Let go of all your previous ideas, concepts, and images of heaven. With the air of the Holy Spirit, the essence of your soul, your mind's eye, image you are soaring in heaven. Perceive God. Perceive the multitude of people. In the next three minutes of silence, communicate with a few people in heaven. Amen

Scripture proclaims, **Hebrews 11:40-12:3 "God had a better plan for us: that their faith and our faith would come together to make one completed whole, their lives of faith not complete apart from ours. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Jesus who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart."** Amen