Many moons ago I used to lead large groups- the largest one being over 6,000 young people- in doing movement to music called “energizers.” One of the most popular energizer amongst high school and college students is Kirk Franklin’s Revolution. Of course leading these, I memorized not only the movements but also the lyrics. It starts with a beat- and while that is happening one simultaneously moves their arm to slowly form a cross. It goes like this…Boom. The Book of Revelations Chapter 7: Verses 16 and 17 (yes sir)…Boom…They shall hunger no more, neither shall they thirst anymore (preach, preacher)…Boom…and God shall wipe away (yes, sir)…Boom..every tear from the eye (yes, sir)…Boom…get ready… for the revolution (Come on, come on, come on,). Whoa…whoa, whoa…do you want a revolution? Whoop! Whoop! You get the idea. The point is that I wonder how many of those young people actually listened to Franklin’s words and took them in- actually embodied them. Franklin and the Nu Nation choir sing/rap, *No crime (no), no dying (no)- Politicians lying (uh), everybody's trying- to make a dollar, it makes me wanna holler-The way I do my life, the way they do my life. There's gonna be a brighter day. All your troubles will pass away. A revolution's comin', yes, it's comin', comin'. Revolution's comin', yes, it's comin'. A revolution's comin', comin'. Whoa- whoa- do you want a revolution? Whoop! Whoop!* And then they eventually get to the roll call- *Where all my East Coast saints at? Whoop whoop. Where my West Coast saints at? Whoop whoop. Where my De-troit saints at? Whoop whoop. Where my Dallas saints at? Whoop whoop. Where my Chi-Town saints at? Whoop whoop. Where my ATL saints at? Whoop whoop. Where my Greenville saints at? Whoop whoop- nah, it doesn’t say that but you get my*

point. For many young people, this song may be their first introduction to the Book of Revelation. Many of us usually shy away from the Book of Revelation for various reasons- we don't understand it or we don't like the thought or mis-teachings of the Rapture or Apocalypse or not great theology found in books or movies like Kirk Cameron's *The Left Behind* series. Most of us are intimidated by its obscure symbols, numbers, and allusions. "There's not enough time in one sermon, of course, to address all the distortions that have put stress on this text's capacity to speak a clear word. Giving attention to this text is more like going to a museum than going into the study surrounded by books. Worship on this day reminds the church that we are connected and included in a great company of God's people in every age and generation. It also reminds us that we are not alone or isolated in God's time. We must not become impatient with Revelation as we want to rush past the images and feelings to get to the meaning" (Richard Ward, workingpreacher.org). If we stay long enough and allow ourselves some holy imagination, we'll discover that the book of Revelation, with its startling imagery, was written to Christians in Asia Minor. It is a letter, written by John of Patmos, to seven churches "made up of poor and marginalized folks trying to survive, resist, and refuse assimilation into the Roman empire" (C, Wess Daniels, workingpreacher.org). Seven is a biblical number for wholeness or completeness. John has woven seven into every aspect of this book. Jewish Apocalypse is communicated through symbolic imagery and numbers. It is not a secret code to predict the end of the world. John expects his readers to go and look up what these symbols mean. Yes, he knew his audience. These seven churches, at the end of

the first century, suffered due to Roman brutality and violent persecution. The temptation in the day was to deny Jesus and to join the spirit of the Roman age. Jesus promises a reward for those who endure and stay faithful to Jesus. Again, the text is intended to describe the intensity of their struggle, using symbolic language and images. In other words, it is not meant to be taken literally; but is like a Sci-fi novel with a message to uncover. In order to understand what is happening, we need to go back to Chapter 2. One of John's biggest complaints was about the seven churches not directing their worship to the right person. Rome also promised salvation. But John sets things straight. Salvation does not come from Rome. Salvation comes from God" (Anna M. V. Bowden, workingpreacher.org). In Chapter 5 Jesus is identified, in a vision, as the Lamb, the agent of God's purposes. In this vision, John sees God with a scroll in God's hand and only Jesus is worthy to take the scroll, open it, and unseal the seven seals (vv. 4-5). In Chapter 6, as the seals are opened, the people wait for God's judgment/wrath. After the sixth seal is opened, everyone hid for fear of wrath. And then…before the seventh seal is opened, there is an interruption, a pause, an interlude, so to speak. John offers another vision and lifts the eyes of God's people from the difficulties of the present to the glories of the future. In this vision he invites them to see behind the veil/curtain- to the multitude of people gathered there "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" (v. 9)- singing about to whom their salvation belonged- to "our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb" (v. 10). John invites them- in his

vision- to join the other saints in worship. John gives a preview of the way things will be and are- the work of the Lamb and what he has done. This great, diverse multitude stands before God's throne and worships God. Before we turn to God's word for us this day, let us first pray.
PRAY. READ.

On All Saints' Day, we remember that the church is bigger than the people sitting in these pews. All Saints' Day is not simply about celebrating extraordinary people. It is about remembering ordinary people whose faith, love, courage, and perseverance bore witness to Christ. Here- in this place of worship- we are surrounded by a communion of saints across generations, cultures, nations, and circumstances. Notice who is gathered: not people who voted alike, thought alike, looked alike, or lived alike. God's kingdom is not a gathering of people who agree on everything. Heaven forbid! It is a gathering of people redeemed by grace. As we approach midterm elections, we are surrounded by messages designed to divide us into opposing camps. Revelation offers a radically different picture of belonging. God's ultimate destination is not an escape from creation but God's presence dwelling among us- a diverse us. Christianity is not ultimately about escaping earth to get to heaven. It is about God's movement toward us- God coming to dwell among us and redeem creation. Perhaps one of the most countercultural things the church can do right now is practice belonging to one another when the world is busy teaching us whom to fear? And I digress.

Here we are given this surprising image of the Lamb becoming the Shepherd. The One who was sacrificed is the One who leads, protects, and gives life. This is a very different understanding of power from the one we encounter today in our political and cultural systems. Author and Theologian, Fleming Rutledge, in her book, *The Crucifixion*, reminds us that Christian faith does not promise an escape from suffering. Rather, it calls us to confront suffering and evil in the cause of love and justice. Fleming writes, "Christianity does not recommend suffering for its own sake." She goes on to explain that Christian faith calls us to accept the risks of love and justice rather than simply avoid suffering. In other words, the Lamb doesn't conquer by becoming another kind of beast. Christ conquers through self-giving love. Perhaps this is the question for the church in every political season: Are we worshiping and reflecting the power of the Lamb or are we simply worshiping and imitating the power of the world? And again…I digress. It's easy to get distracted in the Book of Revelation.

As followers of Christ, even amidst the suffering and temptations of these days, we are people of hope. I love hearing the words of Kirk Franklin's song in my head, along with movements to embody these words of scripture, particularly verse 15-17. These are perhaps the most tender and powerful of the entire passage. God will shelter them. They will hunger no more, neither will they thirst. Preach, preacher. For God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes…get ready for a revolution…whoop, whoop! It's a stunning set of promises if you think about it. God shall wipe away every tear from our eyes- that especially is the promise we remember on All Saints' Day. Death, suffering, injustice

and grief do not have the final word. Notice that God's vision of salvation is not simply about getting souls into heaven. It is about the restoration- the reunion- of God's people and creation. No more hunger. No more thirst. No more suffering. No more tears. This vision also invites us to shape how we live right now- today. For if God's future includes a world where no one goes hungry, thirsty, or forgotten, then the church cannot be indifferent to those realities in the present. Sounds like it's time for a revolution to me!

All Saints' Day calls us to remember those who have gone before us- not because they were perfect, but because their lives remind us that God's grace is at work across generations. And Revelation gives us a glimpse of where the story is headed. A multitude gathered. A Lamb who is a Shepherd. A God who wipes away every tear. In a season when so much energy is expended on deciding who belongs, who is right, who is best, who is worst, who wins, and who loses, the church- we- are given a different vision. We belong to Christ. Our hope is in Christ. And our future rests in the hands of him-the Shepherd and the Lamb. Perhaps our calling in these days is not to win the argument or even to have the last word, but to live in such a way that people catch a glimpse of the kingdom John saw?

Theologian and Historian Diana Butler Bass says it better than I. She says, "That's the message of these verses from Revelation. We see a veiled insight of ourselves, of human community through time. The dead (who are, oddly enough, still living) who have come through the ordeal; and the living (who are, oddly enough, often dead to life) who are still

here dealing with tribulation. That's what the Christian tradition calls the communion of saints. On All Saints' Day, we remember. We remember those who have been through the ordeal; we remember we are one with them while we are still in the midst of our lives." She continues, "We see, for a moment, through the veil. We remember those whom we knew; we remember those whom we never knew; we remember even those whose names are lost to all except for God. We remember not because they were exceptional (some of them were surely remarkable, others maybe not so much!). We remember because we are one with them, and they with us. We remember we are all human beings, all beloved of God. We remember we are much more than those who look like us, those who share our history and traditions, those who speak our language. We remember because we will one day be with them. In fullness. All of them. Face-to-face. No longer veiled. Then, we will have passed through the ordeal. We will join their life of unimaginable gratitude, beauty, wonder, and love. A life without want; a life without suffering; a life without grief. That's the story that Revelation tells of our world, its hidden meanings, deepest purpose, and ultimate fate. The world we see; the world we typically don't. The whole thing, the entirety of time and reality, is held in the love of God" (Diana Butler Bass, *The Cottage)*. You see, the saints remind us that we are not the first to walk this road of faith in the midst of suffering and temptation. And Revelation reminds us that we will not walk it forever. The Lamb is our Shepherd. The future belongs to God and we, too, are held in the love of God. Do you want a revolution? Whoop, whoop! Amen.