

REJOICE THAT YOUR NAMES HAVE BEEN WRITTEN IN HEAVEN!
Sermon for the 4th Sunday after Pentecost, 2022
Luke 10:1-20

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel from before: Luke 10:1-20: **After this the Lord appointed seventy-two other men and sent them out in pairs to go ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was intending to go. ² He told them, “The harvest is great, but the labourers are few. Therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest! ³ Go! Look! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. ⁴ Do not carry a purse or a bag or sandals and do not greet anyone on the road! ⁵ Whenever you go into a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ ⁶ If a man of peace is there, let your peace rest on him, but, if not, it will return to you. ⁷ Stay in the same house and eat and drink what they give! For a worker is worthy of his wages. Do not move around from one house to another! ⁸ Whenever you go into a city and the people welcome you, eat what is set before you! ⁹ Heal the sick that are in it and tell the people, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you’! ¹⁰ However, whenever you go into a city and they do not welcome you, go out on its streets and say, ¹¹ ‘We are wiping off against you even the dust of your city that has clung to our feet! Nevertheless, realise this: The kingdom of God has come near you’! ¹² I tell you, on that day it will be more bearable for Sodom than for that city. ¹³ How terrible for you, Chorazin! How terrible for you, Bethsaida! For, if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. ¹⁴ However, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. ¹⁵ As for you, Capernaum, you will not be lifted up to heaven, will you? You will go down to Hades. ¹⁶ The person who hears you hears Me, and the person who rejects you rejects Me. The person who rejects Me rejects the One who has sent Me.”**

¹⁷ The seventy-two men returned with joy. They said, “Lord, even the demons do what we tell them in Your name.”

¹⁸ He replied to them, “I was watching Satan falling like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹ Look! I have given you the authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and on all the power of the enemy, and nothing at all will harm you. ²⁰ However, do not rejoice because the spirits are subordinate to you! Rather, rejoice that your names have been written in heaven!”

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We are called to be good stewards of God's creation, caring for it as it has been entrusted to us.¹ We understand that all that we have is daily given, preserved, and kept for us by God, and for this, it is our duty to love, praise, and thank Him without ceasing², and so we are only too happy to keep asking ourselves, "*What can we do for God to help preserve this world we live in until the Lord comes again? How can we take care of His wonderful creation?*" And so, we go about our daily business being the good stewards He wants us to be.

All this is fine, but what about the spiritual realm? By this, we mean, when we're talking about our relationship with God Himself, who is NOT part of creation, is the important thing what we can do for God or what ***God can do for us***? That is a question that our Lord Jesus Christ addresses to us today when He speaks of the joy of names that have been written in heaven.

In our text, the Gospel for today, we find a group of Jesus' disciples who have been rejoicing in one thing, but Jesus tells them there's something else *even more wonderful* to rejoice in. Let's find out more and then see how this relates to us.

Here's the setting. Earlier, in Luke chapter 9, we read how Jesus had sent out His twelve disciples on a limited mission, sending them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and authorising them to cure diseases and cast out demons. This they did, preaching the Gospel and healing people. Then, on their return, they told Jesus all they had done.

Now when we come to chapter 10, we find how "**the Lord appointed seventy-two other men and sent them out in pairs to go ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was intending to go.**" Remember, Jesus had a wider group of followers than just the twelve. So, Jesus sends out these seventy-two, giving them similar instructions. He tells them to "**Heal the sick** (in the cities you enter) **and tell the people, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you!'**" Afterwards, "**The seventy-two men returned with joy. They said, 'Lord, even the demons do what we tell them in Your name.'**" Things must have gone very well for them.

Well, what did they expect? Jesus Himself had cast out demons several times so far in His ministry. Therefore, if He had authorised those seventy-two to do the same, then that is what would happen. Jesus' word, Jesus' name - these carry authority and have

¹ Psalm 24:1-2

² 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18

great power. After all, Jesus Christ is the Holy One of God, the very Son of God. Of course, He has authority over the devil and all the demons. So that is what those seventy-two would have as He sent them out in His name. But was that the *biggest thing* they would find joy in? Would that be their joy, namely, what they were able to accomplish doing His work? Or is there something more, even greater?

Jesus went on to tell His seventy-two disciples: **“Look! I have given you the authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and on all the power of the enemy, and nothing at all will harm you.”** ²⁰ However, do not rejoice because the spirits are subordinate to you! Rather, rejoice that your names have been written in heaven!” In other words, *“What I’ve given you to do in My name, the work I’ve given you to do - that’s all well and good. And it includes having authority over the demonic realm. But don’t lose sight of the bigger picture. You’ve got something even greater to rejoice over. It is the joy that your names have been written in heaven!”*

“Rejoice that your names have been written in heaven!” What does Jesus mean by that? The concept or image of people’s names being written in heaven, written in a book of life, is not unique to this passage in Luke. It’s all over the Bible. Let’s look at a few examples.

In Exodus 32, Moses had interceded for the people of Israel, asking the Lord to forgive their sin, and then added, *“but if not, please blot me out of Your book that you have written”* (v. 32). In Psalm 69, the psalmist talks about the righteous being enrolled in *“the book of the living”* (v. 28). In Daniel 12, there is the prophecy that God’s people would be delivered, that is, *“everyone whose name shall be found written in the book”* (v. 1). Then in the New Testament, in Philippians 4, Paul mentions the names of several individuals who have worked with him in the cause of the Gospel, *“whose names,”* Paul adds, *“are in the book of life”* (v. 2-3).

Finally, when we come to Revelation, we see this “book of life” and “names written in heaven” business all over the place. In Revelation 3, Jesus’ promise to the Christian who overcomes is that *“I will never blot his name out of the book of life”* (v. 5). In chapter 13, the ones worshipping the blasphemous beast are described as *“everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.”* Likewise, in chapter 17, those *“whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world”* (v. 8). In chapter 20, at the final judgment, anyone whose name is *“not found written in the book of life”* is thrown into the lake of fire (v. 15). To be sure, it will be a fearful thing if your name is not written in that book. But for those whose names are found written in that book, the outcome will be quite different and much better. In Revelation 21, we read about the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city, and those who will be able to enter there are *“those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life”* (v. 27).

“*The Lamb’s book of life.*” “*Names written in heaven.*” This is where our great joy is to be found - in Christ, the “*Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). “**Rejoice that your names have been written in heaven!**” This is not something that we have done. This is something that *God has done*, and He has done this for us, by His grace, *as a free gift*. Our names are written in heaven, **written there with the blood of Christ** - this is how we get in that book. Christ Jesus, the Lamb of God, the Lamb who was slain, was slain as the sacrifice for our sin. His blood cleanses us from all our sins.³

So this is what Christ is on the way to doing as He heads to Jerusalem. His name, “*Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*”⁴ - His name would be written on a plaque nailed to a cross so that our names would be written in heaven, in the Lamb’s book of life.

God joined our names to His name when we were baptised into Christ. There, the triune God placed His name upon us. He knows our names. They have been written in His Book, and He will call each of us by our names when Christ returns and raises us from the dead. Each one of us has a place reserved there with our name written on it.

Dear friends, this is what Jesus wants us to rejoice in. It’s fine that we can be stewards of God’s creation, taking care of what He has entrusted to us. All this is good. But even greater, far greater, is what God has given us in our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Our sins have been forgiven. Our redemption has been purchased. Our salvation has been won. Our resurrection from the dead and our eternal life is secure in Christ. We have been baptised; we are God’s children. We have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit, to give us faith in Christ our Saviour. Notice, these are all things *we did not do*. God has done them for us. God has gifts He wants to give us, and they come wrapped up in the Gospel, in Word and Sacrament.

That is why Jesus would have us ask: “*Ask not what you can do for God. Ask what God can do for you.*” That is faith. That is rejoicing in the main thing. Jesus didn’t want those seventy-two to get mixed up on this, and He doesn’t want us to get mixed up on it, either. Yes, we do rejoice over how God blesses our work here on earth, being good stewards of His creation, but the big joy - the one indispensable, unchangeable, and eternal joy we have is this: **rejoice that your names have been written in heaven!**” Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

³ 1 John 1:7

⁴ John 19:19

PRAYER FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Lord our God, You are our strength and our joy, for everything You do is marked by kindness and love. Because You are gracious, we trust in You and offer You our prayers.

We thank and praise You for all Your kindness to us: for blessing us with life, for equipping us with all our powers of body and soul, for giving us the ability to be useful, for permitting us to enjoy Your creation, and for surrounding us with the warmth of human relationships in every facet of life.

We confess our sins before You, repent of them, and earnestly turn from them. Do not look on us in anger, for Jesus' sake. We praise You above all else for Your grace in Christ Jesus. You have sent Your Son to die on the cross, and have raised Him in power and glory, to provide all the riches of our salvation. In Him You have given us free pardon for all our sins, the strength to overcome evil, and the sure hope of eternal life.

We rejoice in the death of Your Son, through which you have been reconciled to us, so that we may approach You as a God of love. Comfort us with Your free forgiveness, and fill us with the new life of the Spirit. Help us to be alert and to stand firm in faith in every temptation and test, so that we may resist Satan and His evil tricks, and hold our ground against all evil.

Be gracious to Your Church, O God, that it may seek the lost, lift up the fallen, comfort the broken-hearted, and heal the afflicted. Enable Your pastors and people to proclaim with courage and conviction the message of life in Christ Jesus, and to declare to all people Your mighty acts of judgment and mercy. Cause growth among us, through Your powerful Word.

Reveal Your power to all lands and nations. Remind people everywhere that You are the Lord of all history, that You judge the leaders of the nations, and that You have the power to break bows, shatter spears, and destroy all human might. Grant that all people may turn to You and follow Your truth.

Be the heavenly guest in all our homes. Move all families to trust You in everything, and to love and serve each other, until that day comes when You call us from our homes on earth to live with You in our heavenly home for ever.

Bless all who are in any need of body or soul. Teach them to humble themselves under Your mighty hand, trusting that You remove all burdens in Your own good time. Teach them to place all their worries on You, and assure them of Your infinite understanding and loving care.

Gracious God, since You have called us to share eternal glory in Christ, make us strong, and make our lives holy. Hear our prayers for the sake of Jesus, to whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER
PENTECOST
(Proper 9)

Isaiah 66:10-14

¹⁰ All you who love Jerusalem, rejoice with her and be glad for her! All you who are in mourning over her, rejoice greatly with her, ¹¹ that you may suckle and drink your fill from her consoling breast, that you may drink deeply and refresh yourselves from her full nipples! ¹² For this is what the LORD has said: “Look! I am extending peace to her like a river and the splendour of the nations like an overflowing stream. You will suckle, you will be carried at her side and be bounced on her knees. ¹³ I shall comfort you as a mother comforts her child. You will be comforted in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ Your hearts will rejoice when you see this. Your bones will flourish like young grass.”

The hand of the LORD will be made known to His servants, but He will express His wrath against His enemies.

Galatians 6:1-10, 14-18

¹ My fellow-Christians, if a person is overtaken in some sin, you who are spiritual should set such a person right again in a gentle spirit! However, watch yourself, that you also may not be tempted! ² Carry each other’s burdens, and so you will fulfil the Law

of Christ! ³ For, if anyone thinks that he is something when he is nothing, he is deceiving himself. ⁴ Let each one test his own work! Then he will have something to boast about concerning himself alone and not concerning somebody else. ⁵ For everyone will carry his own load.

⁶ The person who is instructed in the Word should share all good things with his instructor. ⁷ Do not be deceived! God is not mocked. For a person will harvest whatever he sows.

⁸ For the one who sows to his own sinful nature will from his sinful nature harvest destruction, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit harvest everlasting life. ⁹ Let us not become tired of doing good! For we shall harvest, each in his own appointed time, if we do not give up. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of faith! ...

¹⁴ May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world! ¹⁵ For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but what matters is a new creation. ¹⁶ May peace and mercy also be on all those who follow this rule, namely, on the Israel of

God! ¹⁷ From now on, let no one make trouble for me! For I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. ¹⁸ May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, my fellow-Christians! Amen.

Luke 10:1-20

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