



**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School**  
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**Fourth Sunday after Pentecost**

**July 7, 2019**

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**“Rejoice That Your Names are Written in Heaven!”**

*(Luke 10:17,20)*

Rev. David K. Groth

*“The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!’ And he said to them . . . ‘Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven’” (Luke 10:17, 20).*

**Every day, everywhere, by everyone...  
sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd.**

**Collect:** Almighty God, You have built Your Church on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone. Continue to send Your messengers to preserve Your people in true peace that, by the preaching of Your Word, Your Church may be kept free from all harm and danger; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

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Do you remember the story of Oskar Schindler? He was a German industrialist who is credited with saving the lives of about 1200 Jews during the Holocaust. Schindler had figured out what the Nazis were doing and so he set out to protect as many Jewish people as he could from the concentration camps. He saved them by employing them in his factory. For each individual, each Jewish employee, Schindler had to pay a price in the form of hush money to corrupt Nazi officials. As time went on, he had to give Nazi officials ever larger bribes and gifts of luxury items obtainable only on the black market. He spent his life's savings paying these bribes, and then started unloading his personal possessions, his gold watch and silver cigarette case and so on. He bartered goods for lives. But as a Jewish man or woman, to be on his list of employees, Schindler's List, was to be safe, at least temporarily.

There is another list of life that is better by far. The Bible often calls it "the Lamb's Book of Life", and on it are the names of God's elect, the names of those he destines for salvation.

When the 72 returned to Jesus from their first mission trip, they were thrilled to report to him how well it had all gone: the teaching, the healing. Almost giddily they said, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" They are rejoicing in their success, but Jesus invites them to rejoice instead in God's grace for them: "Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you; rejoice that your names are written in heaven." That is our chief joy should not be that we have certain gifts and powers, but that God has received and accepted us, and that our names are "written in heaven."

This is not a new teaching. Way back in Exodus, Moses pleads before the Lord on Mt. Sinai to forgive the sins of the people, quote, “but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written” (Ex. 32:32). That is, ancient kings would keep lists of their subjects – those who belonged to the king. Moses knows God also remembers those who belong to him, and is offering to be cut off from God’s people if it would save Israel. But such an exchange is not possible. Psalm 49, “No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him—the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough” (v. 7). Eternal life cannot be bartered in exchange for a gold watch or a silver cigarette case . . . or in exchange for the life of a sinful man.

The book of life is mentioned in Daniel as well. He speaks of the end times as a time of great distress, such as has never been seen before. Quote: “But at that time everyone whose name is found written in the book – will be delivered” (12:1).

Seven times in the Book of Revelation, the Lamb’s Book of Life is mentioned, such as in Revelation 21, “But nothing unclean will ever enter [heaven], nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”

The critical question is: Is your name written in heaven? And how can you know? It is, after all, the single most important list on which your name could ever appear, because it’s the list of those who belong to God, those who are already or one day will be in heaven. Who wouldn’t give anything to be on that list? Who wouldn’t sell all he has to have the assurance his name is on that list?

But you know it doesn’t work that way. You can’t buy, give, trade or earn your way onto that list. And to make matters worse, you and I tend to worry more about other lists.

It starts early. A couple of weeks ago, I learned how competitive it is in China to get your children into kindergarten. It’s based on a rather comprehensive examination, one that parents will spend significant time and resources preparing their children to take, using online tutors

and the like. For many young people in America, the most important list to be on is that of the Varsity team, or of the sorority, or the Dean's list.

Lists are important to us. Sometimes we will even compromise our faith and principles to be on the right list. Remember how Simon the Pharisee invited Jesus to dinner, but then snubbed Jesus by not greeting him in the customary manner? Simon was worried what the other Pharisees might think of him. He wanted to stay on the A-list of Pharisees, so he was playing it safe by throwing a cold shoulder toward Jesus.

You know, we do the same. In the safety of the sanctuary we confess our faith, sing the hymns, pray, discuss Scripture . . . but outside we play it safe. Even when the Lord prepares for us opportunities to witness, we freeze, we clam up, sometimes because we're not sure what to say, but often because we don't want to lose our standing, our reputation, our acceptance.

I haven't mentioned it for a while, but our mission remains, "Every day, everywhere, by everyone, sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd." That's the goal, the mission. But what's the reality? "Once in a while, in safe places and among safe people, a few might share the grace of the Good Shepherd." We fear being dismissed as narrow minded, out of touch, or gullible to old fashioned ideals.

We admire the courage of people like Oskar Schindler, and like to think that under similar circumstances we would also take risks to save others from certain death. But the truth is, right now we have opportunity to be instrumental. The Holy Spirit can use our witness to bring people to Jesus so they too can be on His list of life.

I ask again, is your name written in heaven? How can you know? The answer is not found in how often you witness to others, or how effective you've been as a Christian evangelist. No. The questions to ask are: Do you believe that Jesus is your Savior? Are you baptized? Jesus promised, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved."

Some have been taught or have concluded on their

own that that's not how it works. They believe god exists, but one who will judge them on the basis of how they have lived, what they have accomplished in life. So many in the world think of God not as a forgiving Savior, but more like a fussy accountant keeping meticulous lists (not of the names of his beloved people), but rather of every foul word, every stray thought, every wayward glance. They think of God as like a prosecuting attorney building his case against us. How tragic and sad, because it misses the whole point of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They've never really heard the Good News of Jesus, who is not out to get us, but to save us; who is not out to condemn us but to give us eternal life. God does not, in fact, treat us according to our sins, but according to his mercy and love. And God does not blot our names off the Lamb's Book of Life. Psalm 51 says according to his great compassion, he blots out our sins instead, with his blood. He is a God of grace, a God who loves to save.

Your worth then is not determined by any list here on earth. Your worth is determined by the One who purchased and won you with his blood. Your identity is not determined by being the most valuable player on the team, or the most productive employee at work, or the most altruistic member of the community. It is determined by our God who put his name on you in Holy Baptism and created saving faith in you by water and the word. Your name is written in heaven not because you've always been so lovable, but because God has loved you in Jesus Christ. Your value is determined not by what you've done, but by the One who decided you were worthy of his holy life in exchange.

"Rejoice" said Jesus, "that your names are written in heaven." The word "written" there might also be translated as engraved. In other words, there's a sense of permanence. Your name wasn't just lightly penciled in, with a big old eraser perched on the corner of the desk. No, it has engraved, as with hammer and chisel. So in Revelation 3, Jesus says, "I will never blot out his name from the book of life" (v.5). In Romans 8, Paul says "nothing can separate us

from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (v.39). In John 10, Jesus promises, “I give [my sheep] eternal life . . . no one can snatch them out of my hand” (v.28).

Earlier I asked, “Who wouldn’t give anything to have the assurance his name is on this list?” But you don’t have to give anything. You already have this assurance by God’s promise. Rejoice that he knows your name. Rejoice that he has written your name in heaven. Or as he promised in Isaiah, rejoice that he has engraved you into the palm of his hand (49:16).

Jesus told his disciples, “Do not rejoice that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” Similarly I say to you today: Don’t rejoice so much that you live in a beautiful home; rejoice that heaven is your home. Don’t rejoice that you have a high tech security system in that beautiful home of yours; rejoice that you are resting in his hand from which no one and nothing can pluck you. Don’t rejoice so much that you have a healthy body; rejoice that you belong to the body of Christ. Don’t rejoice so much that your folks plan to give you a nice inheritance; rejoice that you are heirs of God, co-heirs with Christ. Don’t rejoice so much that your name is on a list for having earned something. Rejoice that your name is on the list for having been given something. Rejoice that your name is written in heaven.

And then, take some risks, won’t you? Take some risks for those who do not know or love the Lord Jesus, and witness to his goodness, his love, his grace. Every day, everywhere, by everyone . . . share the grace of the Good Shepherd. Amen.



