

Somewhere I once saw a cartoon drawing of the entrance to heaven. Big, open gates led into the eternal presence of God. Clouds and angels were hovering all around. A long line of people was moving toward the gates. Off to the side was a huge book with names written in column form like a big telephone book. Everyone in the line needed to stop and see if his or her name was written in this book. If it was, in you went. If not, well, you get the picture.

The basis for the drawing was Revelation 21:27, "Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does with is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life."

Now we could argue about just how accurate that cartoon's picture of heaven really is, but I doubt any of us would argue about wanting **our** names written in that book of life. The way John describes heaven in this chapter gives us a glimpse of the most incredible, wonderful place.

He says heaven is filled with light. The light, however, doesn't come from the sun or moon, but from God Himself. He is brighter than any light we have ever seen. The place is radiant, magnificent, and beautiful. We all know how wonderful light can be. You're scared on a dark street, a moonless night, and then you walk into a brightly lit home or business. What a relief! How welcome the light is! Or the power goes out. The flashlight batteries are dead and you can't find a candle or your cell phone. The house is eerie in the quiet darkness. It feels like a pitch-black cave. You can't see. It's frightening. Then the electricity is restored. The lights power on. Yes! Light, wonderful light! And heaven is infinitely better, as the glory of God, encompassing all of heaven, will shine brightly forever. Those in the book of life will bask in the radiant life of God.

John also reports that heaven will never be threatened by evil or danger. No one will fear the crime that so often comes during the cover of darkness at night. The light of the Lord will never stop. But everything evil will **cease**. No more pain. No more tears. No more hurts. No more hunger. Nothing bad will ever defile the purity of heaven. And once there, those in the book of life will never have to leave. Incredible!

Yes, we want our names written in that book of life. We want to be there. The only problem is that the reasons someone is excluded could describe us. Those who are unclean, do something detestable, or tell lies will not be found in the book of life. Now that's frightening because we've all done things like that on many occasions.

Jesus says in Mark 7 that what defiles a person, makes us unclean, is not so much what happens outside of us, but what goes on inside, in our minds and hearts. He mentions such things as pride, evil thoughts, sexual immorality and lust, envy and jealousy. Watch television and you get envious over something someone has and you don't. Get a raise, buy a new car, win an award, and pride rushes in. Watch a movie, a video on-line, or look at some magazines and lust is just a picture away. We can't go through a day, an hour, without one of those thoughts or desires defiling us, making us unclean. As for doing something detestable, all of us have those moments when we're just ashamed of what we've done. It could be the words we've used in anger that hurts someone we love very much. It could be the betrayal that can go on in a marriage. Maybe it's an addiction that's destroying your family, your life. Or how about the huge debt load you've built up buying stuff for yourself that puts terrible stress on everyone else at home and keeps you from helping those in need. We've all had those moments when we detest something we've done that has hurt ourselves, someone close to us, even our relationship with God.

As for telling lies, do I even need to go there? Who of us could pass a lie detector test if *everything* we ever said was held up for examination?

It doesn't look good for having our names written in the book of life if being unclean, detestable, and deceitful would keep us out. Go back to that cartoon drawing at the gates of heaven. The angel looking at the book reminds you of a hostess at a fancy restaurant, reservations required. You give your name. The hostess glances at the reservation list, looks up and says, "Sorry. Your name's not here." No table for you. What could be worse than hearing those words on Judgment Day? "Sorry. Your name's not written in the book of life. You don't get in."

And that's the way it *would* be for us- except, the book of life is not just any book. Go back to Revelation 21:27, and you will see that it's the Lamb's book of life. Whose book is it? The Lamb's and Jesus is the Lamb.

John the Baptist, when he sees Jesus coming to be baptized, says, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). In Revelation 5, the angels and all the company of heaven are singing, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing" (5:12). Why? Because those in heaven fell down before the Lamb and sang a new song in the words, "You were slain and by your blood You ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God" (5: 9-10).

Those who are in the Lamb's book of life are there because the Lamb has written their names, **our** names, in that book. He wrote our names when He shed His blood to wash us clean. He was slain on the cross to forgive whatever is detestable in our lives. He takes away deceit and lies and presents us as blameless, spotless, without blemish to His Father in heaven. Yes, He writes our name in the book of life.

Go back to your Baptism. In the baptismal liturgy in our hymnal, the pastor asks, "How is this child to be named?" The sponsors respond. Then comes the water, poured over the child's forehead. The name of the triune God is spoken and joined together with the name given to that child. At that moment, Jesus wrote that name (pause) **your** name, when you were baptized, into His book of life. Take out your baptismal certificate. See your name on it. That's written in the Lamb's book of life.

But, of course, we've done what is unclean, detestable, and deceitful since that Baptism. Are our names still there? Remember, it's the **Lamb's** book of life. When you come to worship and bow your head to confess your sins, you **know** who is listening. Jesus hears you admit to those sins of thought, word, and deed. His response comes through precious words of forgiveness. "In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins." Your name is in His book of life. Jesus holds your reservation by His forgiveness.

The same thing happens at the Lord's Supper. To write your name in the book of life, Jesus shed His blood; His body was slain. At His Table, we receive His body broken for us, His blood poured out for us. A wafer placed into our mouths and a sip of wine are just a taste, but, what a great foretaste it is! We have a glimpse of heaven as the very presence of Jesus fills our lives during that Holy Meal.

But something else happens during The Lord's Supper. We're not the only ones at the Lord's Table. The communion liturgy has an eye-opening phrase in the Preface, when we hear it and take it to heart: "Therefore, with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify your glorious Name." 'With **all the company of heaven.**' Imagine the communion rail extending out and around the altar. We're kneeling on this side, but on the other side is all the company of heaven, all those whose names are written in the book of life. Everyone who has died and walked into the glories of heaven is joining us at this Table.

Today is All Saints' Day. A saint is not someone who is nicer or more religious than anyone else, although that's usually how it turns out. It's not someone who is clean and always does what is right, and tells only the

truth. There would be no saints if that were the definition. No, a saint is someone who is on the most important list of all- the Lamb's book of life. The saints are those, both dead and alive, who have been forgiven by Jesus. Saints are those who are drawn to the risen Christ in faith, and on the Last Day come to live in His glorious light forever.

And today we remember those who have already walked through death and have been greeted by Jesus Himself, welcomed home because their names have been written by the Lamb in His book of life. We have the names of those from First Lutheran who died this past year printed in our bulletin. In a few moments those names will be read aloud as we lift up prayers of thanks and for God's precious comfort.

When I think of the Lamb's book of life, I don't picture it as some type of impersonal telephone book where I just see if my name is there. No, I think of the book of life as the place where I see the names of my family and loved ones, congregational members, and other people I know who have died and whom I long to see again. On All Saints' Day; the book of life is Jesus' promise that darkness, grief, death, and detestable lies will one day be gone. It's His wonderful promise that the whole company of heaven, including those we know and love most, will be praising and glorifying the Lamb in that incredible place of light and safety and beauty forever. Amen.