

# Sermon: All Saint's Day

The Rev. Mike Wernick

November 1, 2015

Year B

Isaiah 25:6-9

Psalm 24

Revelation 21:1-6a

John 11:32-44

When I was in seminary... we learned that some people in the medieval church were superstitious... and believed in magic... at that time... the service was in Latin... and when the priest spoke the words of institution... *hoc est meum corpus*... (this is my body)... with his back to the people... in a noisy sanctuary... what parishioners heard was *hocus pocus* ... and the idea of Eucharistic magic was born... sometimes... like a hospitalized movie character who only pretends to take their medicine... they'd pretend to eat the bread at communion... but would discreetly slip it into a pocket... and bring it home... and put it away somewhere safe... then... if anyone got sick... they could offer it up as a divine and healing medicine... or if the crops weren't doing so well... they could plant it in the field... like cosmic miracle grow...

In our Protestant communion services... we emphasize real presence over transubstantiation or consubstantiation... please see me later if you have any questions about what those are... we emphasize the real presence that comes... as Jesus said... when two or three are gathered together in his name... we don't fully understand it... it is half Mystery and half Mystery... but we trust that promise as true...

So what about the magic of baptism... spiritual cleansing with water pre-dates Christianity... the Hebrew word *mikveh* literally means *any gathering of waters*... but is specifically used in Jewish law for the waters or bath for the ritual immersion... some sources say the building of the *mikveh* was so important in ancient times it was said to take precedence over the construction of a synagogue... immersion was so important that it occurred before the high Priest conducted the service on the Day of Atonement...

before the regular priests participated in the Temple service... before each person entered the Temple complex...

In the Episcopal and Lutheran churches... our traditions recognize the right of any Christian to baptize in an emergency... though it must then be reported and recorded... but generally... pastors and priests baptize... because we baptize in community... not privately... we baptize in community... with the understanding that we are all connected... we are all members of the body of Christ... we baptize in community... with the realization that being a Christian is hard work... and when we walk The Way with others... there's support... we can learn so much more... and it can even be fun... we baptize in community... because without community we can't really have much social accountability... we baptize in community... because if there's any magic... it's the group consciousness that comes when we're gathered together... with one mind... and one purpose...

Now our two denominations are in agreement... that a sacrament is an outward and visible sign... of an inward and spiritual grace... what we do on the outside... the liturgy we enact... this rite of passage... reflects something that happens to us on the inside... for us Christians... water baptism is our public acknowledgment that we die to our old egotistic... myopic selves... and are reborn as a part of of something incomprehensibly bigger than we are... and I believe that it's by God's grace... that we come to experience something larger than ourselves... something beyond ourselves... a Mystery that brings both joy and what they call the fear of the Lord... which also means knowing who we are... and knowing who we're not... but as they say... be careful what you wish for...

I've shared this quote before... and think Annie Dillard said it so well: *Why do people in churches seem like cheerful, brainless tourists on a packaged tour of the Absolute... does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke... or... as I suspect... does no one believe a word of it... it is madness to wear straw hats or velvet*

*hats to church... we should all be wearing crash helmets... ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares... they should lash us to our pews... for the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense... or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return...*

I don't think Annie means we'll pass through the Stargate and never be able to get back to Earth... I think she means that when we engage the Living God... and open ourselves up to Emmanuel... to God with us... when we experience the deep connection that we all share... when we reject the divisions between us as lies... when we heal any family of origin dysfunctions... when we begin to experience how what we think... say... and do... affects our neighbor and God's creation... when we live into the real potential for which we were created...that's the real magic... and we'll be changed so much... that we could never return to who we were before...

The death and rebirth into which we're invited... helps keep us honest... certainly with others... but especially with ourselves... helps keep us from telling stories to ourselves about why we do what we do... keeps us from rationalizing selfish behavior... helps move us away from considering only ourselves... to considering others... to considering all of creation...

In our Jewish Scripture reading and Epistle today... we hear God's promises that death will be swallowed up forever... that God is with us... and that all things are being made new... in our Gospel today... Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead... but he tells the assembled community to unbind him... Jesus gives new life... but that new life needs community to help free it... that new life needs community to encourage it...

Like me... many of you have noticed certain billboards all around Michigan... designed to encourage... they're from the 2012 Michigan Fitness Foundation Campaign... and are geared towards parents... they're the ones that say: *They learn from watching you... eat more fruits and vegetables... and they will too...*

Josh and Christy... the promises you make today... on behalf of Molly... are significant promises... you're agreeing to model the Christian life for her... to help form her in her life in Christ... to help her experience what a unique and precious child of God she is... and to help her keep that preciousness in perspective... that doesn't mean you'll need to have all the answers... it doesn't mean you'll need to be perfect... but it does mean that you... and the community which witnesses your vows and renews its own... will need to help her turn back to God when she strays... as we all do... and one day... we pray that she will come to know here [head] and feel here [heart]... that she is inextricably connected to all of creation... that her part in the body of Christ is indispensable... and that even though she is both saint and sinner... she could not be folded into God's love any more than she is... or redeemed more thoroughly... and for that we say: Amen!

Mike+