

# Sermon: All Saints' Day

The Rev. Mike Wernick

November 4, 2018

Year B  
Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9  
Psalm 24  
Revelation 21:1-6a  
John 11:32-44

We all have the privilege... of tending the sick and the dying... it's something much of the secular world goes out of its way to avoid... and it may be a difficult thing... but it is not a bad thing... death is a part of life... the seed must die in order for the tree to grow... we know... we believe fully... that God has swallowed up death forever... but when embodied people... lose embodied love ones... the body wails at the separation... and this grief is not un-Christian...

In foolish eyes... in short-sighted eyes... in eyes which see only the surface value of things... their departure is thought to be a disaster... but they are at peace... so while we rejoice that the one we love has entered into God's nearer presence... we sorrow in sympathy with those who mourn... Jesus himself wept at the grave of his friend...

Gail O'Day... a contributor to the NIV Study Bible... who herself died last month... wrote that the Greek word in v. 33 of today's Gospel... the word that describes how Jesus felt when he saw Mary weeping... is translated in the NIV as *deeply moved*... and in the NRSV as *greatly disturbed*... she wrote... *it is important not to sentimentalize Jesus' reaction and his tears... these verses highlight the bitter cost and power of death in human lives... but they also underscore the significance of Jesus' ultimate victory over death...*

Death brings powerful feelings... and feelings are difficult to control... they're not expedient and can be messy... but feelings aren't right or wrong... and we can never determine or predict for someone else how they will feel... we must ask them... and do all we can to provide a safe space in which they can reply...

And not every death is the same... and how we respond to death is not a uniform experience... and it's not just about how we feel... because death brings about a great disturbance in our world... maybe even anger... and without that person in our lives... we need to ask... *Who am I now... Who do I want to be without that person...*

All Saints' Day is a celebration of... and memorial service for... those who have died... but it's also a celebration... that the Word became flesh... and in our reading from Revelation... perhaps the actual movement is a surprise... instead of us going up to Heaven... instead of us being raptured up... the Holy City... the new Jerusalem... comes down out of heaven... and the home of God is among mortals... and God will  *dwell with them as their God...* the more accurate meaning of the word dwell... is *to tent... or tabernacle...* God will tabernacle with them... as their God...

There's an image from today's Wisdom reading too... that I really like... that speaks to life... *they will shine forth... and will run like sparks through the stubble...* running like sparks through the darkness... light in the darkness... that our lights will shine... bringing life out of death... this is one of those images which no one may ever have videotaped... but which contains truth...

And the truth in all of Jesus' actions up until now has been grace upon grace... the blind see... the deaf hear... the lame walk... the hungry are fed... and what Lazarus is resurrected to... is relationship... remember... in the next chapter... Jesus is in Mary... Martha... and Lazarus' home... for dinner... that's when Mary takes that pound of nard... and anoints Jesus for his own death... it is an intimate expression of relationship... and relationship extends far beyond beyond family...

The raising of Lazarus is Jesus' last miracle... it's the one that puts the authorities over the edge... and leads to his death... and resurrection... but we feel some resistance... there is some disbelief that this is what our God does... we don't always quite know what to do with that... it makes no sense... but it also makes perfect sense... because it

is the defeating of the foe named death... and if we ask... what does God's love sounds like... it's the whispered name of Jesus' favorite... you... and you ... and you... and we too will be raised to new life...

Some think that saints are perfect... that the enlightened can't be normal people... that they must be unstained by the world... recluses or aesthetes... detached and withdrawn... that all of them must live in the desert like the early church Mothers and Fathers... or in Medieval cloistered communities... but saints are in the world... they learn... they make mistakes... they forgive each other... they may argue... or raise their voices... or swear... or drink... but they are human too... we just sang about them... / we'll sing about them shortly...

We are saints when we live lives of broken authenticity... we are saints... when we are engaged in the world and lean away from Empire... we are saints when we do what we can to manifest God's Kingdom... we are saints when we do all we can to extend to others the same grace and forgiveness that God extends to us...

The Baal Shem Tov... the founder of Chasidic Judaism... taught that God never stops calling us... every day... God's voice echoes from the place of eternity... it ripples through time... tugging at us... *Come back... my children...* and in Matthew 25:34-40... Jesus used a parable to talk about this call... *The king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'*

*Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was*

*it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'*

The King doesn't say anything about how easy or difficult this work is... and it is difficult... God's work is difficult... but the Talmud reminds us that while we're not obligated to complete the work... neither are we free to abandon it... and I for one would rather hear the King acknowledge that this is difficult work... than give us reasons why we ought not bother... I'd rather hear the King talk about how we're all in this together... than say it's every person for her / him / or themselves... because God says we're all in this... we're all worthy... we're all saints...

When I was in Jr. High School... some kids would put their feet up on desks... the teacher would ask them... *Do you put your feet up on the furniture at home?*... if they said *No*... the teacher would say... *Well, don't do it here!*... if they said... *Yes*... the teacher would say... *Well, don't do it here!*...

Today's reading about Lazarus is not just a miracle story... it's a story about revelation... a story that reveals how we are released from all the dark... and stench-filled... and binding places in our lives... and from all kinds of death... but it takes both God... and community... and then there's the mistaken notion that religion and politics don't mix... what doesn't mix is religion and partisan politics... because God's will for us... and for all of creation... transcends red... and blue... and purple... it is the color of love...

You know there's an election in two days... and remembering my Jr. High teacher... I say... if you've never voted before... *Vote!*... if you always vote... *Vote!*... it is a great privilege which is not afforded every adult in every country... and while I may not... while I will not... tell you who to vote for... or how you ought to vote on the issues before us... I will ask you... however you vote... to vote from that place where God calls your

name... from that silent place where your heart beats with God's heart... and to vote in ways you believe will be Gospel... that is Good News... for the greatest possible number of people... it may be God's work... it may be God's will and not ours we seek... but that work is done by sainted hands... and we are always being made new... Holy God... make it so...

Mike+