

11.7.2021 All Saints Sunday

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 24; Romans 21:1-6a; John 11:32-44

“Christ makes all thing new”

Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Today on All Saints Sunday we celebrate the great hope of the Christian faith that through Christ all things are made new. The grace of Jesus Christ makes us new; Christ promises a new heaven and a new earth, and today, we remember all the baptized people of God, living and dead, who make up the body of Christ, the church. We are also part of the communion of saints.

As we celebrate All Saints Sunday, we also realize that we are nearing the end of the church year. The church year concludes on Christ the King Sunday, November 21st, as we remember Christ’s kingship of the world, the cosmos and all dimensions of time. Today, as we near the end of the church year we hear Christ’s words, “*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.*” The end of the church year is about the “big picture” of the Christian faith.

Nowhere do we see this more than in Article Three of the Apostles’ Creed. Each week we confess these words: “*I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.*” These are all realities we participate in through faith, and at same time we anticipate these things in God’s future of a new heaven and a new earth.

In the third article of the Apostles’ Creed we confess our faith in the Holy Spirit, and what this means for us over a lifetime as the Spirit leads and gathers us into the holy catholic church where we join the communion of saints. Through Christ we are forgiven our sins, and we forgive the sins of others. We look forward to the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. We know all these things through the faith that burns in our hearts, and we long for a future we cannot yet fully see.

Today as we light candles remembering the saints who have lived among us, we also confess something profound about the shape of God’s plan for our lives. In a world that is unrelentingly about the present moment and satisfying our desires and cravings, as Christians, we also look out onto the horizon of God’s in-breaking kingdom longing for a better world and lives where we can more fully help and serve God and others.

To lead the Christian life is about living with two calendars, one measuring the days of our lives, and the other anticipating Christ with us as the church - the communion of saints. Last Monday,

November 1st was All Saints Day, and so today we give thanks that Christ has overcome death, giving the hope of eternal life to all who believe. All Saints Day is an ancient third century commemoration that began when there were far too many martyrs, witnesses and saints to remember individually, and so the church began to remember all the saints on a single day. The present date of November 1st was set by Pope Gregory III in the eighth century by appointing an office of prayer for all the saints in Old St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

As we think about the "big picture" of the Christian faith today, and our fellowship with the saints as a church, let's look at the end of the Apostles' Creed. When we confess the words "*I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church,*" we confess our belief in the catholic or "universal" church gathered by Holy Spirit. This church exists globally in the here and now, as well as eternally, encompassing the past, present and future of God's reign. This is the universal church.

When we confess our belief in "*the communion of saints,*" we confess the reality of the resurrection that because Jesus died for all, no one lives and dies to themselves alone (2 Cor. 5:14ff); we are gathered into God's kingdom. As we light candles today for St. Mark's saints, we give thanks for their faithful witness in our lives and in our church. Saints aren't perfect people, rather they are people who realize the need of Jesus in their lives, and following the call of Jesus, they carry the cross in discipleship living for and suffering with others.

When we confess our belief in "*the forgiveness of sins,*" we are confessing our need for forgiveness and asking for grace to forgive others as we have been forgiven. We are forgiven so that we know how to forgive and live as people reconciled in Christ, freed to live for others. Reconciled, we no longer live apart from one another, but are called into Christ's body, the universal church, to bear one another in service and love.

When we confess our belief in "*the resurrection of the body,*" we speak of a future hope and also a present reality. The Easter stories of Jesus emphasize his resurrection, not as a disembodied "spirit," but as a bodily person who lives anew in the Spirit. The Eucharist provides the surest symbol of the resurrected body of Christ Jesus present in the bread and wine. In Holy Communion, our human suffering is healed and transformed by the presence of the Lord who comes to us in his Holy Supper. We are fed at the Lord's table so that we might feed and care for others. In the Eucharist, we glimpse the communion of saints in "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1).

Every week we confess these things in the Apostles' Creed. We confess our faith that God makes a difference in the daily reality of our lives, while also confessing our hope in God's promise of a

new heaven and a new earth. This is the “big picture” of our faith: we believe in the life everlasting even when we are not yet able to fully see or participate in it.

And so we arrive at today’s gospel. Before raising Lazarus, Jesus spoke to his sisters Mary and Martha. Jesus spoke first to Martha, saying, “*Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die*” (Jn. 11:25-26). Jesus asked Martha, “*Do you believe this?*” – and like us, Martha confessed her faith in a reality she had not yet fully experienced, saying, “*Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God.*” Like us Martha, Mary and all the disciples confessed their faith in the resurrection as a reality to be hoped for in Christ.

Jesus then spoke to Mary and she responded with words of grief and words of faith to Jesus, “*Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died.*” Mary’s words express the reality that grief is the price we pay for love, yet Mary expressed a firm and certain hope that Jesus could have healed Lazarus, who had also been his friend. Jesus, too, shared Mary’s grief at the death of his friend Lazarus. What happened next biblical scholars and Christians have grappled with for 2,000 years. Jesus ordered the stone covering Lazarus’ tomb taken away. Giving thanks to the Father, Jesus cried in a loud voice, “*Lazarus, come out!*” The dead man came out of the tomb still bound in strips of cloth. Jesus said, “*Unbind him, and let him go.*”

Jesus restored Lazarus to life; a dead man was released from death. It is, of course, an event that foreshadows the resurrection. Lazarus was given human life again. He was restored to his family and friends. But of course, Lazarus would die again. Lazarus was unbound from the shroud of death and given life again. It makes me wonder, “How did Lazarus live his life after being restored to life?” Did life seem more precious to him? Did he live as if each day were a gift? Did he seek to share his time and gifts with others knowing that time itself is a gift?

What would you do if you were given a second chance at life? How would you use the gift of time and the gift of the breath of life? Would you live seeking to help unbind others whose spirit had died? Would you seek to give hope to those who had lost hope?

All of us face death and many of us have died over and over again because of life’s defeats, addictions, mistakes, and unrelenting burdens. Many of us live in bondage to guilt and remorse. Jesus, who restored Lazarus to life, lives among us today. Jesus cries out to each of us in the tombs of fear we have made, saying, “*Come out!*” The resurrection of Jesus is real and we can rely on his grace. Jesus will release you from the tombs you have created. Jesus continues to come to us in

every chapter of our lives with resurrection and hope. As he asked Martha, Jesus asks each of us, “*Do you believe this?*” Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

The reading from Isaiah today speaks of this: “*And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever.*” No human being, absolutely none of us, is immune to fear and death. Yet the good news for us is that “*God will wipe away the tears from all faces...let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.*”

This is the hope of faith: Christ makes all things new. Knowing Christ is what makes us saints. Saints aren’t any better or more perfect anyone else. Saints simply know of their need for God’s grace. Saints live each day depending upon Jesus to set them free from sin and death so that they might live with hope for others. If anyone is in Christ they are a new creation.

Christ says, “*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.*” These words are important. In Greek the beginning means “the source of all things,” and the end means the “goal” of all things. On All Saints Sunday we remember that Christ is both the source and the goal of all time and history. Christ is alive making all things new. Each week as we gather around his table, Christ forgives and remakes us through his body and blood into the church, the communion of saints.

Jesus’ words to Lazarus, “*Unbind him and let him go*” are good news for us. Jesus releases us from sin and death, so that we may go forth from this place to be living signs of hope for others. To be in Christ is to be a new creation.

In the new heaven and the new earth, it is said that the sea was no more. The boundary of the seas that separated peoples and nations will be no more. Though we simply fly over the oceans today, they nevertheless represent real boundaries and borders between peoples. Today we remember that Christ crosses all boundaries and borders, all seas and oceans, gathering his church, the communion of saints together in every culture and language. The new heaven and earth that our faith anticipates is a world of unity and peace between peoples and nations.

Through faith, we already experience the beginning of a new heaven and a new earth. The church is a visible sign of the kingdom worshipping in every culture and language. The communion of saints is a global fellowship of saints gathered around Christ. Christ’s resurrection frees us to imagine a world without death or strife. Christ makes us new so that we can give hope to others.

Let Christ renew you again today. Let Christ unbind you from the fears and death you face daily. Live with hope. Christ makes all things new. Amen.