

11.3.2024 All Saints Sunday

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

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

“He is making all things new”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Today on All Saints Sunday, we encounter Revelation’s promise, “*See the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples...he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more.*” In the last book of the New Testament, John the Revelator writes with a confident hope in the promise that Christ, the Alpha and the Omega, has overcome death, and is making all things new.

Today we remember the saints throughout history who have witnessed to a magnificent hope of eternal life in Jesus Christ. Today we also remember that we are the living saints whose faith is built upon this great cloud of witnesses.

Like the saints before us, we also long for a new heaven and a new earth. We long for something that death cannot touch. Like them, we live hoping in Christ. Like them, we also shed tears and struggle with life, while believing that Christ has overcome death. Like them, amid the world’s strife and brokenness, we also walk by faith with hope for a new heaven and a new earth. John’s Revelation beautifully captures both our finite limitations and our infinite longing for unity between our time and God’s eternity.

Today, God’s voice speaks to us from the throne, saying, “*See, I am making all things new.*” God’s voice offers a hope that death cannot touch. “*See, I am making all things new*” is the promise that God continues to actively create life out of death and hope out of sorrow. On All Saints Sunday, we remind ourselves of our Christian hope: We are saved by grace through faith that frees us to live within God’s eternity now amid the limits and brokenness of time.

We are more than aware of our own mortality and our brokenness. If it were not so, we would not long for an end to wars, strife, and division. Yet like the waters of Revelation, God’s grace was poured over you in Holy Baptism: “*To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.*” We thirst for eternity’s waters, and over and over, like the saints before us, the waters of baptism have quenched our thirst in the wilderness of life.

As human beings, we know we do not yet wear the garment of immortality because we, too, will one day die. Yet we cling to the hope of Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 15, “*this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality.*” This is the

mystery that we celebrate today: Though we die, yet shall we live. Christ is the mystery and the sacrament in whom we have died and been raised in Holy Baptism.

The saints of the church whom we remember today are saints not because they were perfect people or because they were better than others. They are saints because, like us, they lived in the knowledge of their brokenness and need of God's grace. Saints live trusting that God has forgiven and freed them in baptism from sin and death to live for Christ and their neighbor. Today, we give thanks to God for this victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

In today's gospel, we feel the grief of Mary and Jesus. Mary's words express a longing to overcome death, "*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*" Jesus was also distressed, grieving at the death of his friend, Lazarus. A few verses earlier, Mary's sister Martha also said, "*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died,*" and Jesus told her, "*I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.*" In Jesus, we see that the home of God is among mortals. We know that death is not the end of life.

Through this story of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, we realize that Christ is always present amid suffering and death. He is with you. He is the silent companion on all your journeys. He is the one who weeps with us, and he is the one who opens the way to eternal life. God is not the divine watchmaker who created the universe, set it in motion, and went away. He is Immanuel, God with us.

As Jesus stood before Lazarus' tomb, he wept. We notice how Jesus shares in our human grief. In Jesus, we vividly see the depth of God's love for each of us and for this world. Jesus was not only Lazarus' friend; he is also ours. What a friend we have in Jesus! Jesus makes holy the resting places of all the saints.

We also notice how Jesus raised Lazarus and led him out of the tomb to new life. While our faith hopes upon resurrection as a future event, we also know that Jesus has led us out of those places of despair and grief, out of those tombs into which we have found ourselves walled into.

Has there been some moment in your life that, because of mourning and crying, has felt like death? Has there been some moment in your life when, overcome by regret, addiction, or illness, you have felt the limits of your own mortality? And yet, Christ met you in that place. Christ met you there, wiped away your tears, and led you out of what felt like death into newness of life, saying, "*Come out!*" Jesus does this again and again in our lives giving us hope among life's little deaths that we might face our own death with hope knowing he is with us.

He raises us from death to life, always making us new to live as saints with hope for others.

There is a powerful symbolism easily seen today in this sanctuary. As you look toward the high altar, you see the baptismal font suspended above the Lord's table in the shape of a dove, the symbol of the Holy Spirit. Following this line of sight, your eyes are led to the All Saints Cross on which we will light candles remembering the saints. From there your eyes are led to the stained-glass windows always revealing the Communion of Saints gathered in glory around the resurrected Christ. We are also among the living saints at the bottom of these windows. These symbols point to the promise of new life in Christ: Baptism, cross, resurrection, eternal life. Symbols are powerful because they point to a reality beyond themselves. They point to the reality of baptism, that we have been baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, sharing in the inheritance of the saints.

This reality of God's grace and love unfolds over our lifetimes: Baptism, cross, resurrection, eternal life. Over a lifetime, our perishable bodies put on imperishability as we experience, over and over, Christ freeing us from sin and death to new life.

One day, candles like those on the All Saints Cross will also be lit to represent each of our lives. We are the saints journeying toward the place Christ has prepared for all who believe.

Eternal life begins in baptism. He lives that you might never die. Over your lifetime, look to him. He is making all things new. Amen.