

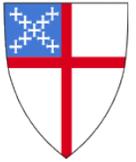
Sermon for the Celebration of All Saint and All Souls, Nov. 7, 2021

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene The Rev. Dr. David Gortner

[Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9](#)

[Revelation 21:1-6a](#)

[John 11:32-44](#)



Happy All Saints Sunday! Welcome to St. Luke's and to this Celebration of All Saints and All Souls.

These are beautiful texts from the Bible for today, when we remember, celebrate, and give thanks for all the saints who have gone before us and for all of us alive today around the world being made saints – the great company of all whom God has loved and who have loved God and their neighbors with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength – all whom God has made saints.

Hear these beautiful words again, from the apocryphal Book of Wisdom and from the end of the Book of Revelation.

“The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them.”

“In the time of their visitation they will shine forth, and will run like sparks through the stubble. They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will reign over them forever.”

“See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes.”

Those who have died, we give over to God in trust of God's unfailing love, mercy and grace that only we individually have power to refuse. “For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but that the whole world through him might be saved.”

Today, we remember and celebrate the dead. Today, we give thanks for all the saints who have shown us in their lives glimpses of God's glory, justice, love, and life-giving, liberating, transforming love. Today, we delight in the saints and call upon them to pray for us as we continue to feebly struggle as they in glory shine (as that favorite hymn, “For All the Saints,” says).

Today, we remember all the dead – saints and sinners alike, every single person a mix of them because we are all imperfect, twisted, fallen and distorted even as we also glimmer and shine with the glory of the image of God that is at the core of who we are as God's beloved children. Today, we also pray for all those who have died, that they find full rest, deep restoration, the completion of their redemption and full re-creation in the resurrection life of Jesus Christ the firstborn from the dead. We pray for them as they wait, with us, for the final resurrection, that “great, getting-up day” when all creation is drawn together in Christ, when there is a new heaven and new earth and Jerusalem comes down and God dwells with mortals.

Remember them, friends. Remember them.

✦ Who do you remember today?

Who are the “big saints” you treasure, who have been models and guides for you, who have pointed you on the path of God’s righteousness, justice, beauty, mercy, and love?

✦ Who are the “small saints” you have known personally, who have touched and shaped you, whose words and actions and ways of being still resonate with you and call you to more than you otherwise would be without them?

Remember them. Celebrate them. Give thanks for them. And ask for their prayers and encouragements for all of us.

✦ Who else do you remember today? Maybe not people you might personally consider saints, who nonetheless are beloved children of God and just as dependent on God’s mercy and grace?

✦ Who over the ages might be held before God in prayer for redemption?

✦ Who in your life might be held before God, asking God for their healing and redemption even now, beyond the grave?

Soon, we will turn to prayer, and we will open ourselves as fully as possible in our prayers to the unity that is now between the living and the dead.

The Gospel takes us right to the veil and through the thin veil that we think divides us as the living from the dead. Today, we hear the miracle of Jesus raising his friend Lazarus from the dead.

Jesus prays as he does right at the entry to the tomb so that all the crowd of friends and neighbors and relatives can hear – because Jesus recognizes that everyone is bound in their own tombs of mind and heart, in their doubt and despair and giving up – and Jesus he wants to bring everyone who is bound in their own tombs out from the tomb. See, everyone in this miracle is Lazarus, in their own way. And Jesus wants to free everyone, just as he is freeing his dear friend Lazarus, from death and from all that divides us.

Note that this is the only place in all of the Gospels that we find Jesus crying. Now, Jesus doesn’t weep when he first gets to Bethany and meets Martha. Martha says to Jesus the same thing that Mary says. Martha speaks in more controlled and “rational” ways with Jesus (in the verses before what we read today), and Jesus responds in kind. But Mary says the same thing as Martha, straight from the heart, deep from the gut. She shows Jesus how deeply she is in sorrow. She holds nothing back. And Jesus sees her weeping and others weeping with her. And Jesus weeps. Jesus weeps and is deeply moved by our passion, our desire, our heartfelt emotion. We can pour it all out to Christ Jesus, and to one another as followers of Jesus.

Note the heaviness and intensity of barriers that divide the living from the dead – and how Jesus walks through, calls through, draws us with him to break through all of them. There is the heavy and intense barrier of disappointment and sorrow and grief. There is the fear of stench. There is the darkness of the

tomb, the cave that has been sealed off from the light. There is the heaviness of the stone blocking off the tomb's cave. There is the silence of the tomb – and the silence of heaven. There are the cloths to bind, cover, encase, and hide the dead.

Jesus moves through each of these barriers, and calls us along with him. He enters our sorrow and grief fully. He steps to the cave and moves us through our fears. He calls on us to roll away the stone, letting light to shine through the darkness of the tomb. He cries out to God and breaks our own silence. He steps forward to the cave's entrance and calls out to Lazarus, breaking the silence of heaven with a command that cannot be ignored. And Lazarus emerges from the dead to rejoin the living. Since he is still bound and covered and encased, Jesus calls on us to unbind him and let him go, to free him from the ways we have sought to contain and conceal him.

Unbind him – and as you do, unbind each other.

The living and dead are only separated by the thinnest veil. Indeed, we claim and pray and celebrate – especially on this Sunday, but all through the year – that we are united with all the faithful across time and space, in Jesus our Savior and Lover who unites and brings together the living and dead as one body in his Body.

Remember, friends, that in John's Gospel, every miracle Jesus offers is not just a miracle for this moment, but even more importantly as a sign of something even greater to come. Water turned to wine at a wedding celebration, a paralyzed person healed and walking, feeding of multitudes with so little bread and fish, someone born blind now able to see, a dead person raised and restored to community with the living: Every miracle in John is a sign that opens for us a vision of life with God, new life in God, the life that is eternal and that is resurrection. Each miracles shouts to us, "Look at what awaits you!"

So, we enter this space that we often ignore, today. We enter into this space that is always surrounding us, the company of saints who have gone before us, the space of all souls who have died and are in the hands of God's judgment, mercy, and love. We remember them, hold them in prayer, and call on them to pray with us and stand with us. We light our candles from the Easter candle, the Paschal candle we light at the Easter Vigil and keep lit through all of Easter season and at every funeral, holding ourselves in the same company of those whose light burns with God's grace to all eternity. We light our candles now, as we proclaim our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed that has been declared through the centuries, and hold our lights before God as prayers that join our voices while we pray and call on the saints through the ages to pray with us. We continue to keep our lamps lit through our confession, as we admit our own falterings and failings and receive the grace of forgiveness, and as we share the peace of Christ with one another – and with those who have gone before us.

This is holy time, friends. As it is always holy time. But now, we allow ourselves to glimpse through the veil, and to let it be torn and thrown open, just as the veil in the Temple shrouding the holiest place from view was torn asunder as our Savior Christ Jesus died, entered the places of the dead, led them to final freedom, and opened the gates of resurrected life that awaits us all and has begun even now.

Alleluia!

