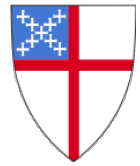


Sermon for the Celebration of All Saint and All Souls, Nov. 7, 2024

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.

There is more to life than Here and Now.

There is more to life than our time and place in the spinning of this earth.

Life in God – Life in Christ who is God with us – Full life steps across and throughout time. The fullness of life is the threading of unity across time and space. Everything we are or do has been touched by others before us and around us. Everything we are or do touches those yet to come after us and those around us now. Life is countless ripples set in motion across the ages and on through the ages to come.

Yesterday, a few of us came here to do some work for the church. We did some work in the altar and chancel area. We changed the colors to white to mark this feast day. We assembled bouquets of flowers. And we reshaped the front of the chancel just below the pulpit.

Everything we did depended on and was preceded by the gifts and talents of others – others who grew the flowers, who made the paraments that dress the altar and lectern and pulpit, who created the cloth and the thread, who made the glass vases, who originally put in the wood front of the chancel, who made the saws and hammers and nails and the wires we re-routed.

So it is with our souls. So it is with our minds and hearts, our thoughts, our ways of living and being and acting and responding in the world. Everything we have done and continue to do draws upon the gifts given to us and shared with us by others.

Our reading before we began the service gives us an example of important moments in the Here and Now of one time that shape history. Naomi is about to return to her homeland after her husband and sons have died, now that food is growing again and the famine back home has ended. Her daughters-in-law can remain in the land of Moab, their home country, and be taken care of. Both want to go with Naomi. Ruth insists even as Naomi caringly tries to guide them to stay. Ruth's words ring out today as pledges of deep loyalty, devotion, and full-hearted love. "Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you did, I will die." I will be with you, through to the end and beyond. The story that unfolds next is an ongoing story of loving care offered and returned, and it leads to Ruth and Boaz becoming the ancestors of King David – and of Jesus, whose word and ministry and life and death and resurrection has changed the world.

These moments matter.

So, today 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.

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, when we all like Lazarus rise at the Voice of Christ Jesus who calls us to come forth.

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?

Today, we will baptize two young ones, Vincent and Walker, who are just embarking on this journey into the fullness of life. In the midst of joining them and their parents and godparents as we renew our own baptismal promises, 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. We will ask them to pray for us and to stand with us, here as we baptize and here as we share in Christ's sacred giving of himself to us in bread and wine.

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.

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.

Vincent, Walker, today you enter on this journey of New Life. People have already been making a path for you. Your adventure will continue to unfold, as you are shaped by people all around you and those who have gone before you. Some of them – we pray, many of them – are saints.

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!