We Shall Live Also

John 14:1-3, 11-21, 25-31 Kimby Young

Hebrews 12:1-3 November 6, 2016

The reading from the gospel of John for today is a familiar passage often used at funeral or memorial services in celebration of the resurrection to eternal life. On this All Saints Sunday as we remember those whom we have loved and lost, I thought I would look at this scripture passage a little more deeply. It takes place after what we remember as the Last Supper on the night before Jesus was crucified. These are Jesus’ last words to his beloved disciples. He knew what was coming, but they didn’t understand. He takes the time to tell them what to expect and what to do in the days ahead, how to remain faithful and to live as God called them to live. This is advice for living that is good for today as well, for those of us who would be Jesus’ disciples today. These few verses are the beginning of what is sometimes called Jesus’ last sermon, and it continues for four chapters in John. In it Jesus reminds us of God’s presence and power, even in the face of death. Jesus reminds us of God’s promise of resurrection and eternal union with God. Jesus reminds us that we will see all those we have loved and lost again.

That is the reminder we hold on to on this All Saint’s Day as well. This is the day when we remember those who have gone before – our family, our friends, church members, community members, people throughout the history of our faith. We remember their lives, their contributions, their gifts, and we remember that they are now with God. So we remember and imagine that future of joy and peace and love. We imagine what heaven must be like. We imagine our loved ones there in heaven in the presence of God.

Sometimes in this life, we get a glimpse of that eternal union. Sometimes we see what heaven might be like, what it will be like to be reunited with those we have loved and lost, how it will be to experience the presence of God surrounding and uplifting us completely. Sometimes we get a taste of that. In fact, quite literally, communion is a taste of that, a taste of heaven. It is a reminder of that great banquet feast when we will all be united with Christ and with all those who have gone before us. It is a reminder of the joy promised and the peace fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It is a reminder that God can not only raise us from the dead, God can even raise us to new life here and now. This feast, this sacrament, this holy meal is a slice of heaven. And today we remember and imagine all our loved ones surrounding us at this table, standing among us, sitting beside us, inviting us to know we are loved, to know we are with God. At this table we are one. And at this table, we receive strength to continue living in this life, not just waiting for that future promised.

That is the challenge of this day, and this scripture passage – not to live mourning what is lost, not to remain in sadness, and not to fear what might be. Rather Jesus called us to live victoriously, knowing that God makes us able to face whatever happens, God gives us whatever we need. The scripture doesn’t say – oh don’t worry everything will be fine. Jesus knew better than that. Jesus knew that the very next day would be the worst day of their lives for those who loved him. He knew they would face not only sorrow and loss, but fear and doubt and perhaps anger. Jesus was giving them what they would need in order to rediscover faith after their darkest moments.

In verse 12 Jesus says, “whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and even greater works” – why – because Jesus will send the Holy Spirit to inspire and empower. Jesus will answer when we ask for help. The Holy Spirit offers us gifts to share and strength to be all that God calls us to be. We are not out here on our own. We have the full power of God behind us – the power of God that raised Jesus from the dead, the power of God that created the world, the power of God that makes absolutely anything possible. That same power has been given to us. Why would we ever doubt that we can do what God calls us to do? You can. God assures us you can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

The scripture says because Jesus lives we shall live also. I don’t think that is only talking about eternal life. I think that living includes here and now. Because Jesus lives – because Jesus empowers us through the Holy Spirit – we are called to full faithful fruitful living here and now. We are called to respond to God’s grace by sharing that love in the world in concrete ways. How will we do that? How will you live God’s love this week? What is it God calls you to do? I ask that a lot – I realize that. But I do believe - that is our purpose - to hear God’s message each day and to respond to that call anew every single day.

So for today, for this week… how is God calling us? It’s been a hard week in many ways. The police officers killed in Des Moines this week remind us of the senseless violence in the world. Other world concerns remind us there is poverty and loss, war and suffering. Personal concerns are mounting for many of you – illness, financial worries, loved ones in trouble. I know it’s been a hard week. It promises to be another hard week in the days ahead. I rarely speak about politics. But in the next week we have an election day – in a very volatile election season. And I am reminded - “Let not your hearts be troubled. Neither let them be afraid.” We don’t know what will happen this week, and some are worried – whichever outcome. Let me remind you that - No matter what happens Tuesday, or Wednesday. God is still God. Jesus is still Lord. And we still belong to God. God will still be in charge. And God will still hold you firmly in peace. You will still be you. Your family will still be God’s beloved children. You are still God’s faithful servants. You are still called to live God’s grace in the world, called to live God’s love, in every situation.

Jesus says, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” In the Bible the word peace means more than just absence of violence. God’s peace is about wholeness, security, prosperity, blessing and fulfillment. It’s about remembering that God is in charge – God is God and we are not.

That peace, promise, wholeness and fulfillment is what Jesus promises here. No matter what happens, remember that we are in God’s hands, under God’s power, and surrounded by God’s grace. Sometimes we can’t see it, often we can’t see it – but God promises – God is still God, and God is in control. Hold on to that promise and remember that you belong to God. In life and in death, at all times and in all places, surrounded by God’s grace, empowered by God’s Spirit – we belong to God. Remember. Remember and live as God’s people in confidence and hope.