Hope in the Resurrection – All Saint’s Sunday

1 Corinthians 15:12-26 Kimby Young

Hebrews 12:1-2: Psalm 23 November 5, 2017

Frequently I have said – I don’t know how someone who does not believe in God, who does not feel the power of resurrection, who does not know the promise of heaven – I don’t know how someone who does not believe, can bear to lose a loved one to death. Without that hope of resurrection, death is so final, so complete, so deep, that the loss is unsurmountable. Even sometimes with that hope and promise, many of us struggle when we lose someone we love. It is our loss we feel. It is our emptiness and aloneness and separation. However, because Jesus rose from the dead – everything changed. We believe – and believe it profoundly – that this life is not the end, that there is something more, that we will indeed be reunited with those whom we have loved and lost. Because Jesus rose from the dead, we believe there is hope. We believe what is yet to come is even greater than the best that has ever been.

Today, All Saint’s Day, is one of those happy sad holy days in the church. It is a day when we remember our loved ones. We remember our losses. We remember God’s promises. And we try to gather strength for a new day. This last year was a tough one in our congregation for funerals. We lost many many saints and loved ones. Our list is long. Our candles are many. But today, we remember again to put that loss into perspective, to place that loss into God’s hands, and to be held warmly in God’s heart. Today we celebrate the lives of those who have died, and we look forward in hope to eternal union with them and with God.

All Saints Sunday is always celebrated with communion – because the sacrament of holy communion symbolically and tangibly links past present and future, better than any other ritual or observance of the church. This sacrament of holy communion is a reenactment of Jesus final meal with his disciples (so past). It is also a current experience of the presence of God (so present). At the same time, communion is a pre-view of that final celebration in the presence of God for ever (so future). The Lord’s Supper is practice for heaven. Every time we eat bread and drink from the cup, we remember death and life. Every time we share this feast, we remember that in Jesus Christ, God conquered death once and for all. Every time we celebrate this meal of remembrance, we know that God has fed us before and God will feed us again, God has always provided for us, and God will in the end provide a home, a haven, a banquet of blessing for us for all eternity. Every time we gather around this table, we imagine that great future time of gathering when all will encircle God’s table of bounty, and all will be blessed in the presence of God and one another.

So today, we imagine, our loved ones surrounding us and gathering around Christ’s table. That is one reason I asked you to bring pictures, and I ask you to imagine faces. In our experience of All Saint’s Sunday communion, we know that we are connected through Christ, we are reunited with Christ, we are communing in fellowship with God and all who love God past, present and future. We are all gathered around Christ’s table. We can only imagine what heaven is like. But that imagination is beautiful and bountiful and blessed. And we thank God as we remember our loved ones and as we anticipate with hope our own day of resurrection.

Our scripture for today reminds us that this is not a new struggle. People have always wondered and sometimes worried about what happens when we die. We don’t know any facts. We have no proof. We are not sure. But we believe. We hear the promises. We hold on to the hope. And we imagine.

Paul’s discussion indicates that some people in that day, even Christians in that day, were denying the resurrection. They believed this world is it. There is nothing after death. Many people believe that today, or fear that today. They believe death wins, that death destroys everything and wipes our lives away. Paul argues that the resurrection of Jesus is essential to our story, essential to our Christian faith. Jesus is not Christ without the resurrection. Our faith is nothing and is not true without the resurrection. Because the resurrection proves the power of God. God wins. God conquers everything – even death. And because God loves us, God offers that power to us. God gives us the power of resurrection. God gives us life now and for all eternity.

So Paul was not just arguing for arguments sake. Paul had a reason for reminding the people of Corinth about the power of resurrection. He was reminding them and reminding us, that God has shared that power with us. God who is more powerful than anything we can imagine. God who has the power of creation and the power to conquer death, has shared that power with us, given that power to us. God who has the power to raise Jesus from the grave, certainly has the power to transform our lives, to conquer our problems, to inspire and empower us to do whatever we need to do. And because God’s love is as great as God’s power, God uses that power for us and offers that power to us. On this All Saints Sunday when we remember our loved ones, we also remember to carry on the legacy and the love they have taught us. As the verse from Hebrews reminds us - Since we have such a great cloud of witnesses – because we have loved ones from the past watching over us and encouraging us on – we can run with perseverance the race that is before us – we can move forward in faith. Because we have the love and support of all who have come before, because we have the assurance of our faith that these loved ones are with God for all eternity, because we have the promise of our own reunion with them at the end of our journey, that gives us the energy, the wisdom, the inspiration, to continue seeking God’s will.

In a few minutes we will share communion. We will gather around this table. We will pass bread and cup. We will celebrate together. As we do, I invite you to imagine our saints still gathered around us, sitting among us. Imagine these people pictured around the room, and other loved ones who come to mind. Imagine them gathered with us around this table of grace – standing as a great cloud of witnesses. For they are with us, every step of the journey – supporting us, loving us still, encouraging us, inspiring us. “Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us run with perseverance the race set out before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.” Let us run with Jesus – the pioneer of resurrection – the first but not the last. Let us run with Jesus – who perfected our faith – who taught us how to live God’s love perfectly and completely. Let us run with Jesus – wherever Jesus leads us. Let us run with Jesus – holding on to the hope of resurrection, and eternal union with God and with all who have gone before. Let us run with Jesus as all the saints have run before. Let us run with Jesus – by God’s grace and to God’s glory. Amen.