All Saints – Places in the Heart

Isaiah 25:6-9 Kimby Young

Hebrews 12:1-2 November 5, 2023

Revelation 7:9-17

For many of us, for any who have lost loved ones, All Saints Sunday is one of the most meaningful and moving worship experiences of the year. We celebrate the lives of all who have passed from this life to the life triumphant. We imagine them in heaven with God and all who have gone before. And we look forward to that day when we will celebrate again together, in the presence of God for all eternity. I like that this day falls before the mad rush of holidays – because we know they will get hectic. And we know that we will miss loved ones. So here on this Sunday of relative quiet and peace, we pause to remember. We let the sadness and the joy mingle together and we move forward with hope. Sadness for our losses. Joy for God’s promises. And hope lived fully in the heart of our God who loves us all.

During communion we hold on to God’s promises of a joyful feast for all who believe, here and in the life to come. We know that our saints are with us even here and now, as we remember and look forward in hope. That’s what communion is all about – being together with God, being with all people of all times and places who are united in Christ. And remembering all of God’s promises. This sacrament of communion links past, present and future as only God miraculously can. We know our loved ones are with God and God is with us through Jesus Christ. We touch across that great barrier of death. And we know that God conquers death and offers new life for all who will receive this gift of grace. Thanks be to God.

Most of you know – unless you are a guest – and if you are a guest – welcome and thank you for being here. Most of you know that my beloved big sister died unexpectedly this June, and I have been devastated by that loss. And you have supported me in that loss and carried me these months. I have been anticipating today for months – and as I said earlier – I just knew I was going to cry at some time or another. And you mercifully will deal with it, or will cry with me. So when the scripture says, “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” You know what that means. It’s not about glossing over a loss or making you feel better. It’s not about moving on and getting over it. Because we don’t get over loss. That line – “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” It is about God transforming reality. God turning death to life eternal. God moving darkness to light and midnight to dawn and loss to hope. God transforming everything.

During the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper – every time we celebrate it, we remember the transformation God offers. Changing death to life. In the death and resurrection of Jesus, all of us are offered new life for eternity. The body broken and the life poured out, takes away the power of sin and death. The unity of the one loaf unites us all with Jesus. We are born anew by that power and love of God in Jesus Christ. Every time we celebrate communion, we remember - Anything is possible by God’s grace. Just look what God did in Jesus. Just imagine what God can do in your life, in our lives together.

Today, on this All Saints Sunday, we recognize the grief of death. We know our losses to be true and real and painful. At the same time, we look forward in hope to that time when we will all be united in God’s love. When we will see that great cloud of witnesses surrounding us. When we will see the ones we love again - face to face. When we will stand with Jesus and know God’s perfect peace. Not too soon, but any moment now.

When we come to this table in a few moments, when we break bread and drink from the cup, we let our imaginations touch the grace of God. We can picture that great homecoming banquet when all are gathered together to worship God. Isaiah describes it well – a feast of rich food, well aged wine, and I would have to add chocolate dripping from every table. It is better than the best potluck you can imagine. The best holiday feast. The best family reunion. And perhaps that is the best part – the family of God reunited - gathered from all times and all places. Sitting with my grandparents and yours, my sister and everyone we love. That is the promise of God for all the people of God.

There is a really good 40 year old movie – Places in the Heart - with Sally Field, Danny Glover and a whole group of stars. In this movie, Sally Field’s husband dies in the first few scenes. I won’t tell you the story, but if you haven’t seen the movie, you have to look it up. Anyway, in one of the last scenes, Sally and her family go to church and have communion. She closes her eyes as she takes communion and passes the tray to her dead husband sitting next to her, and they both smile. He passes it on to the young man who accidentally killed him and then was lynched by a mob. Around the room, the blind man sees next to him the black man his friend who had been run out of town, the wife who forgave her husband shares communion with him, the children are not afraid, the people are united. There is love in the room. God is with them and the miraculous happens. In that sacrament of communion, in that mysterious holiness, Jesus tears down every possible barrier and calls us to be one.

That is what we celebrate today – sitting next to one another, sitting next to those loved ones we have lost, sitting next to the outcast, sitting next to those who hurt, sitting next to Jesus. Today, Christ offers us healing for all that hurts, wholeness for all who are broken. Today as you eat the bread of life, remember Christ on the cross and the love he pours over us. The past is now. The forgiveness is real today. Today as you drink from the cup, imagine and hold onto God’s promise of eternal life for all. The future is now. New life has begun. Gathered around the corners of this room are all the saints in our great cloud of witnesses. They don’t stand passively by. Our saints gather around us to encourage our faithful living, to cheer us on as the scripture says, to encourage us in the life we live. Hear that encouragement and don’t let anything hold you back. God is with us. Christ is for us. We are able to run with perseverance, as Jesus has shown us the way. As Jesus runs this race before us, calling us to follow.

As I said, I knew today would remind me of my sister, and my father, and my mother. And of our saints Alene, Nadine, Doris, Barb, Nancy, Susie. And of some of your loved ones who left us longer ago than this year. I knew I would be reminded and would feel sorry for our losses. Likewise today, I anticipated this table of light and all the memories, all the love, all the grace, all the gifts of many lifetimes. Today is about loss, but it is more about life and love and all of God’s promises. Be filled today – as you take in the bread and juice. Be filled with the fullness of God’s love for you, the certainty of God’s promises for peace, and the joy of salvation already received by all who believe in Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. Let every corner of your soul be filled. Receive all of God’s gifts for you. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

November 5 2023 – All Saints Sunday

Isaiah 25:6-9

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples

 a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,

 of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.

And he will destroy on this mountain, the shroud that is cast over all peoples,

 the covering that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever.

Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces,

 and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,

 for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day,

 “See, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us.

 This is the Lord for whom we have waited;

let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

Revelation 7:9-17

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count,

from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages,

standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white,

with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying,

“Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb!”

And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders

and the four living creatures,

and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, singing,

“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor

and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying,

“Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?”

I said to him, “Sir, you are the one who knows.”

Then he said to me, “These are they who have come out of the great ordeal;

they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

For this reason they are before the throne of God

 and worship him day and night within his temple,

 and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.

They will hunger no more and thirst no more;

 the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat,

for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd,

 and he will guide them to springs of the water of life,

and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,

let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely,

and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,

looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith,

who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross,

disregarding its shame,

and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.