

The Rev. Joel Petruschke
November 7, 2021

Our Saviour Lutheran Church
All Saints' Sunday

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, as we know, on All Saints' Sunday we remember those saints whom have entered the Church Triumphant.

On All Saints' Sunday we remember our family members, our friends, our loved ones, whom are no longer with us in person, but whom are nonetheless still with us in spirit.

In particular, on All Saints' Sunday we remember by name those persons whom have died since last All Saints.

And this year has been specifically difficult for us as a church family, for we have had to mourn several dear and very faithful members, including Diane Lehrman, Arno Miller, Christine Velter, Donna Zimmerman, Connie Johnson, and Julie Drake.

And so it is my hope that this service would provide solace in the midst of our continued grief.

PAUSE

Now, the exact origins of this feast day known as All Saints'...
The exact origins of this day are unknown.

How it emerged? Who started it? No one knows for sure.

But I believe it is God's grace that it has come to be.

And I believe it is God's grace that it has come to be at this time of year.

November 1st is actually All Saints' Day, but the Church celebrates the festival on the first Sunday in November.

PAUSE

It seems most appropriate to observe All Saints' at this time of year when what we see in creation around us makes us more reflective about life and death.

Trees are dropping their leaves. There is the browning of the landscape.

Creation is becoming more barren.

Earth's creatures will soon be settling in for their long winter's nap.

There are more days where the skies are gray and gloomy.

And the days themselves are getting shorter and shorter.

It all lends itself to a more contemplative and introspective state of mind.

This time of year does make us think more about life and death.

And so All Saints' Sunday is appropriately placed on the church calendar.

Indeed, we need to hear the message of All Saints' right about now.

Indeed, we need to hear the message of All Saints' particularly this year when NOT ONLY our church has been burdened with an exceptional amount of grief, BUT ALSO the whole human family continues to grieve during this ongoing pandemic.

And I am not just talking about the loss human life due to the pandemic.

No, I am also talking about the grief we have been experiencing because our former way of experiencing life has fundamentally changed.

Yes, we need to hear the message of All Saints' right about now.

PAUSE

Our gospel reading today then also gives witness to grief, specifically the grief that took place during the time of Jesus' ministry with respect to his friend Lazarus.

We read that not only Mary, Lazarus' sister is overcome by grief such that she is weeping, but also the Jews who are with her are weeping because of grief.

This man had touched several lives, so much so that many are moved to tears at this death.

And all the more, Jesus our Lord is moved to tears because he too loved this man Lazarus.

Jesus had been friends with Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus.

He had visited them in their home. And when he learns that Lazarus has died, he weeps for this man. He weeps for his friend.

PAUSE

Yes, our human tears, our weeping, our crying is the body's way of expressing grief.

It is a mechanism by which the body releases the pent up emotion of sadness and loss.

Crying is natural. It is cathartic. Crying is healthy. It is cleansing. It is beneficial.

Sometimes we need to just let it out.

Crying is part and parcel to our human creation.

God made us so as to be able to express our great grief.

And even our Lord, as we see in this text today, could not help but be moved to tears.

PAUSE

But, the good news of All Saints', the good news of All Saints' is that there is a vision of a day when mourning and crying and pain will be no more.

There is a vision of a day when God will wipe every tear from our eyes.

There is a vision of a day when God will make all things new, and we will abide with God with the great multitude of saints.

This is what is recorded in our second reading today, which comes from the book of Revelation.

"See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

The promise of good news is that God comes to abide with us ushering in the eternal kingdom, the new creation, where we will be reunited with our loved ones for all time.

That is the vision of All Saints’.

It is a vision of a get-together, a vision of a gathering, a vision of a reunion. It is a vision of a community reunited for all time.

PAUSE

Even so, we who yet still journey in our pilgrimage of life...

We who still travel the road of life...

We who still exist in this time, even so we still experience loss...

We still long for our loved ones...

We are see the future vision of glory, and yet we still travel the way of life.

And thus, we grieve, we cry...we let out emotion.

PAUSE

Now, it is interesting, Friends. It is interesting that Jesus not only experiences grief in our gospel lesson today.

Jesus not only weeps. But Jesus actually experiences another emotion in this passage.

Jesus experiences anger and indignation.

The text says that “When Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, Jesus was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.”

But that translation misses the mark.

A better translation of the Greek is that “When Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, Jesus was angry and he was troubled and agitated.”

The Greek verb used here is *henebrimásato*, which conveys the sense of a “snort of anger.”

We might use the phrase “to be in a huff.” Jesus was in a huff.

But, the English softens it so that it reads in our text as “deeply moved,” where then it misses the “anger” underneath the emotion.

However, if we stay true to the meaning of the text, we are left wondering, “What possibly could Jesus be angry about?”

Is he angry with himself, that he didn’t get to Lazarus in time in order to heal him?

Is he angry with Mary and the Jews for weeping, because they don’t recognize the power in Jesus to raise Lazarus?

No, I don’t think Jesus is angry here for either of those reasons.

No, I think Jesus is angry here because of what “Death” does to people.

Jesus is angry because Death takes from us and leaves us in a terrible state of grief.

Jesus is angry at Death. And, in this way, Death is personified in this text.

Death is personified, it takes on a sense of being-ness.

Death is not just that which happens to a person when they no longer have life in them, moving from one state to another.

No, Death in the Bible is an entity, it has being-ness.

Even the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 speaks to Death, as to a person, saying, “O Death, where is thy victory? O Death, where is thy sting?”

It is a fascinating way to look at Death, because to destroy this entity that is Death, as Jesus does by the power of the cross, is to remove that spectral being from our existence.

To destroy the entity that is Death, as Jesus does, is to eradicate that power that will come to overwhelm all of us and make us dead.

Yes, we all die, but the good news is that the spectral of Death does not have eternal sway over us.

The death we die is but a momentary transition from this life to a life with God.

It happens that quickly, so the Bible is wont to say. Quicker than falling asleep.

PAUSE

Jesus is angry with Death here, because of how Death’s power steals from us and grieves us.

And that is why then Jesus in this passage offers a glimpse of the hope we have of new life, by the raising of Lazarus.

And this is why Jesus will himself die and rise again, so that we all have the promise of eternal life, whereby we can look forward to that great reunion.

In Christ, Death's power is mitigated. It is quelled. It is checked.

And thus, this passage teaches us another way to let our emotion out when we experience loss.

We talked about letting out our tears when we are grieving.

But, Jesus also shows that we can let out our anger.

This, too, can be very cathartic. This, too, can be cleansing and beneficial.

It can be extremely helpful to be angry at Death.

We often don't give ourselves enough credit in this respect.

We are perhaps good at crying when we lose our loved one.

But, we don't nearly express enough anger, not at God, but at Death.

My personal opinion is that we need to be furious more against Death, if for no other reason than to get it out.

That wonderful poet Dylan Thomas said it this way:

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rage at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Rage, rage against death. Be angry and furious, and rage at Death.

It is okay, it is natural to be angry at Death for how Death steals from you and me.

And, then, sisters and brothers in Christ, and then, through all of our raging in anger, and through all our tears we cry in mourning...

Even while we are still angry and even while we are still crying...

We then turn to God in praise. And no better way to praise God even while mad at the Devil and overcome by grief...

No better way to praise God is with song.

And on this All Saints' Sunday there is no better song than "For All the Saints."

Song has the wonderful power to uplift our spirits as we praise God.

Song is second only to the gospel, Luther said, with respect to giving us a sense of hope.

Song has the most strange and mysterious ability to reassure us.

And the song "For All the Saints" captures wonderfully the juxtaposition between the struggle of this earthly Christian life AND the glory of heavenly bliss.

And that most beautiful refrain at the end of each stanza pounds home how we live life—even with its losses, even with its griefs and burdens...

The refrain of each stanza resounds with "Alleluia, Alleluia."

A Hebrew word that translates, "Praise God. Praise God."

This is our mantra in every circumstance of life.

Praise God. For ultimately God is in control, because God is victorious through the cross.

Praise God, even when we grieve. Praise God, even when we cry. Praise God, even when we are mad as you know what.

Praise God, because God has accomplished our salvation.

And so, we too will be victorious over sin and death, and we will be gathered one day with all the saints in light.

Praise God. Praise God. Alleluia. Alleluia. Thanks be to God. Amen.