

## All Saints/Souls. November 4, 2018.

Today we are marking the Feasts of All Saints and All Souls. All Saints is given to all those hallowed ones who came before and have been recognized publicly as reliable pointers to God, dependable examples of what a life in God's love looks like. All Souls is a less prominent feast that is basically the private version of All Saints—where we remember our own dear faithful dead, those who in our kitchens and workplaces and Sunday School rooms nurtured us into an awareness of God's grace. They are supposed to be separate, but here we just can't bear to leave our uncanonized beloveds out of the glorious company of the saints. We can't quite imagine a head table in heaven without Mary Jean Sanders and the Bergstroms and Harlie and our parents.

It makes for a day that is knowingly too much—acknowledging *all* the saints, including those generally not recognized outside of our own hearts. Hence it is not the Feast of Every Saint, but the Feast of All Saints, and we end up focusing on what our opening prayer called the “one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of Christ our Lord.” The day ends up being about the one big immeasurable company of faith, almost co-extensive with some combination of Israel and the Church Invisible. And the call rings out clearly through the day to consider the ways that we too are among this group of saints and prophets and martyrs, not through our own merit but because we too are being saved by the love of God. I think the mark of a really good All Saints liturgy is probably if you can kneel at the communion rail and feel your grandmother on one side and the Apostle Paul on the other.

What does it mean now to be a member of the communion of saints? Of course we'd like it to look something like our first two readings this morning: sitting on top of a mountain in a new world, eating a big feast and neither dying nor crying. And I think it's useful to imagine that some day it will be—that God will remake the earth, and peace and justice will reign. God's intention for the purpose of the world stands against the messes we keep making of it. These pictures of the last days are simultaneously a comfort to us and a condemnation of the violence that characterizes the society we have inherited and continue to build.

But we aren't there yet. And in the meantime, being a member of the communion of saints now looks more like our reading from John. Make no mistake, it has a miraculously happy ending. It is a prototypical story of Jesus doing what Jesus always does and still does: calling people out of the tombs, pulling life out of death, loosing what binds and calling us to do the same. But there is nevertheless a great deal of ambivalence within the story.

Mary and Martha had hoped that Jesus could heal Lazarus, but he arrives four days after Lazarus has died. He's late, and his arrival starts their grief over. Mary's regretful faith sets Jesus crying: “If only you had been here . . .” And Jesus is upset in this story in a way we don't usually see. We see him short-tempered, we see him

compassionate, we see him intense, and we even see a couple glimpses of humor. But here he is “greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved,” weeping, and then “again greatly disturbed.” And all this despite his odd prayer asserting that he knows what’s going to happen, but is doing a performance prayer to let other’s in on the secret.

To me, this story is a startlingly apt image of what it means now to be a member here of the communion of saints. The world is not yet what it will be. We are not yet what we will be: guests at a party in a new world. But we are already doing the things that the kingdom of God is built of. We are already going to the places where people are entombed and insisting that the God of life isn’t done with these folks yet. We are already working to loosen what binds our fellow children of God. We do this by caring and advocating for the poor, by insisting that life is sacred and racism is blasphemy, by speaking and becoming the truth, which is love, by calling life forth out of each other here and in the world.

But we are leaning into a kingdom that isn’t here yet. And so sometimes we are late, even too late. A great deal of the time, there are still tears and death. We all have great reason to be greatly disturbed. And that’s okay. I mean, things are not okay, but we are permitted to mourn. Lord knows we have reason.

But we do not have reason to forget what God’s world can be—what God’s world is meant to be. A place where everyone has enough. A place where peoples are not disgraced, where death has been swallowed up by love and God is welcomed among us. A place where we do not give each other reason to weep. This is not the world we have, but it is the world God will make. Perhaps being a member of the communion of saints means above all else knowing this, and living like it’s true. Amen.