

With All The Saints
Revelation 21:1-4
All Saints Sunday
Twenty-fourth Sunday After Pentecost
November 4, 2018
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Revelation 21:3-4 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home^[a] of God is among mortals.

He will dwell^[b] with them;

they will be his peoples,^[c]

and God himself will be with them;^[d]

⁴he 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.”

I think we can all agree that one of the great things about the Christian gospel is the message of hope.

When we’ve been through or are coming through the dark valleys that life puts us in, sometimes we find ourselves, near the place that Jesus’ dear friends, Mary and Martha were experiencing.

Remember....when their brother, Lazarus, died?

The sisters had called for Jesus to come.

They meant SOON, but his answer wasn’t what they expected or wanted.

He wasn’t coming right away.

Remember that? It’s in John 11.

There wasn’t anything left for them to do except mourn and be upset and puzzled (and all those other emotions we have at the death of a loved one.)

Martha confronts Jesus when he finally gets there, *“Lord, if only you had been here, things would have been different. Lazarus wouldn’t have died. Where were you?”*

And we know the rest of the story.

It's the one where, later, we read the shortest verse of the Bible, "*Jesus wept.*"

Jesus saw the grief and he felt it too.

AND THEN: He raised Lazarus to life.

And, hear this, Dear Ones, Jesus Christ, offers hope to all who face death; he will raise to life those who live and believe in him.

HOPE!

That's what we have in Jesus Christ.

It's what we highlighted today as we remember ALL our saints.

The verses that Sally read, from Revelation, describe for us the joyful celebration of those gathered in heaven.

This reference is one of the reasons we sang the particular anthem earlier.

The adoration of the baby in the nativity...continues ALL THE WAY to and through Revelation where we read about the saints who have gone through their time of suffering, have been faithful to the end, and now all of that's behind them.

God has wiped away their tears.

There's no more pain or dying.

And what's left is the celebration as they praise God for the victory he's given them.

The Sacrificial Lamb has died and they are made new.

The crowds of all time....in white robes, victoriously call out, with the angels:

"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was, who is, and who is to come.

Salvation comes from our God, who sits on the throne, and from the Lamb! All praise, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power, and might belong to our God forever and ever! Amen!" (Revelation 4:8, 7:10-11).

We know God's creative work started with light in the darkness.

Then the land and animals.

And then humans.

When God created the Garden of Eden it was a perfect place where God and his people lived in harmony. There wasn't any death or crying or pain.

And then there was...because God's creation took a turn.

And here, God works again, and we read about God creating a new heaven and earth where God will, once again, dwell with the people.

It will be a time when *"The old things have disappeared"* (Revelation 21:4).

What a place that must be!

Our imaginations can run for a long time and we'd still not have a grasp on what it looks like, how big it will be, how many saints will be gathered there....and just how big the book is that contains all their names.

There are some we've heard of because of what they did in Christ's name.

There are some who haven't been named in history ANYWHERE, but ARE recorded in the Book of Life. They weren't famous but they **were** faithful.

They knew they had weaknesses and faults, and they trusted in God's grace and served in whatever ways they were able.

And think of THIS:

In that beautiful place will be all the saints who will come after us, too.

They're the ones to whom we have OR ARE passing on the gospel through OUR words and deeds and who have received the message of Jesus' love.

By our deeds THEY, in turn, will share the same messages...until Jesus comes again. Amen?

I think it is one of the truest blessings that we have because we know Jesus: That there IS hope of a life beyond this life!

Praise God most of us haven't had to face atrocities and tragedies. But, even if we are to face the worst, we can do so knowing that Jesus has made it possible for us to pass through death to a glorious new life in eternity.

By HIS death and resurrection, we have been made right and clean and ABLE to be in the perfect place we call Heaven.

Now, to be sure, I'm not minimizing the emotions we have TODAY or when we have to say goodbye to someone we love.

Even as Pastor Gene and I prepare and share a funeral service, we also walk with families in pain; some numb-er than grief. We feel it and I know YOU do too, as you give care to each other.

We're not built to AVOID those emotions.

But we do know, through knowing Jesus, by the ways we're growing to know him each day, that there's more.

And the valley of the shadows can recede...because the brightness of Heaven is in store for those who DO believe.

I read about pastor who had to conduct a funeral for a child. The pastor THOUGHT they'd given a comforting sermon when they said, *"Don't be afraid. Your child is in heaven with the Lord and they are perfect and whole."*

The pastor wanted to assure everyone in attendance that the child was safe with Jesus.

Afterwards the father spoke with the pastor and said, "I know you were trying to comfort us, telling us our child is in heaven, but that doesn't take away the pain. We're really hurting because miss them so much."

The pastor listened carefully and went home wanting to figure out a way to help the family in their sorrow.

The pastor thought and prayed and as they prepared the next Sunday's worship their eyes fell on the words in the Communion liturgy that we're going to read in a few minutes.

What the pastor “saw” in what they read, was that it wasn’t the pastor’s comfort for the grieving family...anymore than it is the pastor’s meal.

It IS THE *Lord’s* comfort that come in the words of the Lord’s Supper.

*“Therefore with angels and archangels, **and all the company of heaven...**”*

The pastor was able to approach the grieving family again.

“I know you’re separated from your child, and you’re hurting. I know you know that there’s nothing that can be done to bring them back in a physical way. But think about this. When you come to receive Holy Communion, you **are joined together** again with them.”

Praise be for pastors like that!

See, there IS, a moment, NOW, during our Holy Communion liturgy, that heaven meets earth and we’re in this “intimate unity” with **all** the saints.

All the saints! Those who are here, in this life, taking the bread and the juice with us **and** also with those who have gone before us and are in heaven already.

Every time we come to Communion we are *reunited* with the ones who are in Heaven.

This Holy Meal is a precursor of the heavenly reunion we’ll ALL have one day, when we won’t be separated from our saints ever again.

If you’re like me that brings me joy; we can step out of grief into the rejoicing, the ADORE we’ll all be doing!

The pastor in the story I was telling finished up to say that the family came for worship, came to receive Communion and stayed at the altar rail a little longer.

When they DID stand to depart there were no words....only smiles.

No words needed to be said.

Remembering our saints on this day, also reminds us of the hope that we have in Jesus Christ.

In the Apostle Peter's writing we read, *"By raising Jesus from death, God has given us new life and a hope that lives on. God has something stored up for[us] in heaven, where it will never decay or be ruined or disappear"* (1 Peter 1:3-4).

That's the hope that assures us that even though we are separated physically from our loved ones, we are still, in Christ's church, joined to them in Christ.

Not a protestant church.

Not even PPUMC.

It's **The Church**: the holy people of God everywhere, from all ages, in heaven and earth; Christians of all times; all those who've died in Christ and are now raised to life with him to live with him forever.

It's an eternal community that crosses earth **and** heaven and shares in the glory of God.

There's great comfort for us in this HOPE.

While today is a day of celebration in remembering our saints, I know our hearts are squeezed with reminders of grief, too.

So, I pray that we'll grab ahold of the great comfort in today's celebration that those who have lived with Christ in this life, are with Christ in eternity, and whom we have loved, are not lost.

They aren't lost.

And they haven't "passed away" as if they vaporized.

They have **passed on** and are IN a new life.

We can't see them, but they're still with us, in our faith and hope.

And we will see them again.

And if you ever have to be with someone who is suffering...

Or sit with a family who's loved one was snatched away suddenly...

...be a comfort and share what we are affirming today; what you know.

That YOU have hope.

Today we remember *all* God's people – past and present and even those not yet born. We honor the grace God showed them because of their faith.

We should also remember that we have this opportunity every time we celebrate Holy Communion, not just to commemorate but to commune **with** them. It's at this holy meal, in this place where heaven and earth meet.

As you come to Holy Communion today, take a little more time and remember those you love who are no longer with us.

Remember that they are here at this holy meal where heaven and earth meet. Where we join our voices with the angels, the archangels and all the saints gathered around the throne of God praising and thanking God for his love.

Amen!