

November 7, 2021 All Saints Day
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Isaiah 25:6-9, Revelations 21:1-6a,
John 11:32-44

[Borrowing some elements from my own sermon dated 11/4/21]

Grace to you, and peace Beloved Saints, from our God, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Amen.

I am grateful to worship with you today.

On All Saints Sunday we name aloud those who have died this year, tolling the bell, lighting the candles.

...And when the light is already bright, we light still more flames,

conjuring the names, the faithfulness, the struggle,

the living and dying of so many others who have gone before us, humans and beloved creatures alike.

On the rail around our communion table are the names of those from the Hope community who joined the saints eternal this year: Jack, Swan, Ruth, Peter, Edward, and, just this week, Phil Thompson.

In Holy Communion we join with them as a foretaste of the feast to come.

But All Saints doesn't stop there.

When we're tempted to hide our teary eyes and turn inward to ourselves,

our God invites us instead to look into the shining faces of the saints around us,

to squeeze a hand, to hold those closest,

to smile with our eyes, through our tears, masks and all,

to be living saints with and for one another.

We've named those newly baptized this year, but you, all of you, are part of this cadre of saints.

While some traditions elevate just a few as saints,

in our practice there's an equality that, at its purest, crosses all the lines.

On a day like today, I love the rich beauty of mundane memories that are so profound:

the bang of the screen door as they came home,

the laughter at the table,

the uncanny way they knew what you needed before you could articulate it,

the challenges they bore,

the art they created,

the music they made,

the stories they shared, eyes sparkling.

Mary and Martha in today's gospel know this vibrancy, and in turn they know this loss.

Their brother Lazarus has died.

In this gospel snippet, we experience Jesus and his community in grief.

The details here can be helpful.

"If only you'd been here," Mary starts, in some kind of mixture of relief and sadness and anger.

"Couldn't you have done some kind of miracle, you've done it before, couldn't you do it now, for us?"

Oh, how often we're uttered that prayer.

And the tears, the weeping, the numb disbelief.

The awareness of the practicalities, the customs, the necessary timing, the communication, the potential smell, the way the community gathers in support.

We know how this works though it's certainly been shifted these month.

And Jesus' own weeping, his own grief at the surface, his compassion, not hidden, but real, raw.

Honestly, this gospel would be enough, for me, at least,

if only to catch this glimpse into how Jesus and his community live with death and loss.

I need to see them grieving, to know that I'm not alone, that we're not alone.

These years have opened us to grief and loss in new ways, in ways we are just beginning to realize.

With Mary and Martha and Jesus, with their community,

we have much to learn about lament and mourning.

But today's story doesn't stop there.

It goes on to Lazarus' own resurrection, foreshadowing Jesus' resurrection,

and God's way of making life, in our places of death.

Dear ones, our time together is fleeting.

If these last years have taught us anything, it is this.

Let us savor these precious days while we have one another.

Let us hold onto the memories, the witness, of those saints now at rest with God in light perpetual.

And let us rest in grace, in the trust that we are enough, that our cries are heard and held and holy.

May God - in our living and in our dying - be our sure comfort, our hope, our home.

I invite you into this time of naming the saints. Amen.