

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

All Saints Day Observed - Year B

88th Sunday of Pandemic - Masked Service

Isaiah 25:6-9

Psalm 24

Revelation 21:1-6a

John 11:32-44

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

32When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” 33When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” 35Jesus began to weep. 36So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” 37But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” 38Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” 40Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” 41So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” 43When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” 44The dead man

came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

The Gospel of our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

All Saints Day

Good morning! Today is All Saints Day, which means we celebrate the dearly beloved saints that have gone before us. When we hear the word saints, we often think of the Catholic tradition of believers who have performed miracles, but really a saint is just a baptized believer. So that means you and I are both saints! What I find interesting is the selection of our Gospel reading for All Saints Sunday. On a day where we celebrate loved ones that have died and whom we can no longer see, we read a story about Jesus doing the opposite, bringing a man back to life. I’m not the only one who has had questions about this text either. A friend from seminary has for years struggled with this story. You see, it just didn’t seem fair to them. “Why does Jesus get to bring his friend back to immediate life, but I won’t be able to see my mother?,” they would ask. I always respected them for voicing their struggle, for wrestling with God and their faith. As I have often said, it’s ok to yell at God, because our God can take it.

But in order to try and answer that question, we need to dive into the story. Unfortunately, we’re missing some of the pieces. Our selection for this Sunday is just a small section of the whole story that begins 32 verses earlier at the beginning of chapter 11 and continues through for another 11 verses. I was tempted to read the entire chapter for you, but the look Sue gave me when I suggested it made me rethink my idea. (But I will

encourage you to take a read on your own!) So instead, I'll try and summarize things. The story begins with Martha and Mary sending a message to Jesus telling him that their brother, his friend, Lazarus is very sick. But instead of heading to Bethany right away, Jesus stalls. After arriving in Bethany he has an exchange with Martha on the road, and then continues on to see Mary. She leaves her house to meet Jesus, and the crowd of mourners follows thinking that she is going to the tomb to grieve her brother. They meet Jesus and that's where our assigned reading picks up.

Summarizing the insanity of the story, a professor from seminary wrote the following: *"The dead man came out' (John 11:44). It would be difficult to imagine a more unlikely sentence. This is utterly beyond our experiences. We've been given plenty of indication earlier in John 11 about what will happen, but we may still be startled by the man shuffling out of the tomb, unexpectedly alive."*¹ We genuinely have no words for the otherness of this experience. We have nothing to compare it with.

But strangely, it isn't the man coming back from the dead that usually catches us up. It's the emotional response of Jesus that has been the talking point for so many. I have for years pushed people to at least wrestle with the possibility that Jesus weeps out of grief. My professor Dr. Peterson writes that *"perhaps such reactions prompt what may be the most exegetically puzzling aspect of this text: the profound emotional responses of Jesus. He is "greatly disturbed" in John 11:33 and 38, a word that commonly signifies indignation or anger. He is "deeply moved" (verse 33); he weeps (verse 35). What is all this about? Is it an indication of human*

¹<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/all-saints-day/commentary-on-john-1132-44-3>

*grief felt by Jesus? Is he upset because the crowd's grief is hypocritical? Is he angry at people's continued inability to believe (this weeping as a Johannine version of the Synoptic Jesus weeping over Jerusalem)? Is he upset because his own death and tomb are approaching?"*²

As Peterson indicates, scholars have debated for years regarding the reason, but another commentator helps point out a few things I think it's important to realize. They write that *"When Jesus sees Mary weeping, and 'the Jews' who are with her also weeping, he is strangely moved. It is not out of compassion— or lack of it— that creates Jesus' being moved to anger in spirit and troubled... 'the Jews' misunderstand the tears as a demonstration of Jesus' love for Lazarus. The careful use of another verb for the weeping of Jesus (dakuro is used for Jesus' weeping, while Klai is used for both Mary and the 'the Jews' in vv. 31, 33) indicates that Jesus' tears cannot be associated with the surrounding mourning process."*³

You see, this scholar is pointing out that it's the unbelief of those that follow Jesus, the lack of belief that they will see the Glory of God that brings Jesus to tears. Within the Gospel we have seen Jesus confronted time and time again with the unbelief of the crowds and with what is a lack of trust on the part of everyone. The disciples have failed to believe, and even Mary, who had anointed him and had originally believed, has now turned away from her trust. Jesus is heartbroken that everyone he considers a loved one has expressed disbelief. It's still a deeply emotional response for Jesus, just motivated by a different reason. What we have here is a man who feels abandoned by everyone around him.

² Ibid.

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Dr. Peterson writes that *“In grief, people do not only need or want to know that Jesus is powerful enough to raise the dead. After all, then why didn’t Jesus do more to help their own family member, or to stop the monstrous daily march of death through our world? But Jesus is life itself; Jesus himself is resurrection’s defeat of death. Jesus is the place where death ends and everlasting life begins... What we need to hear is that on both sides of the grave there is life for us because Jesus has been sent to call our names. On both sides of the grave Jesus is life for us.”*⁴

Now here is what I find amazing. Dr. Peterson wrote that in 2018, while he himself was in the midst of grief. His son had been murdered in the summer on the side of the road in South Carolina, shot for some unknown reason when having car trouble. In the midst of that pain and that suffering, Dr. Peterson expressed what we all feel when a loved one dies. But he also captures perfectly the hope that comes from belief. And since Peterson was always better at words than I was, I’ll let him have the last word. He writes: *“This is what All Saints Day is for: not just to remember those from long ago or those whose deaths are still painfully near, and not just to point ahead to that ultimate promise of resurrection, though both of these are certainly part of this day and to be affirmed. More centrally, however, this day is about what all God’s saints have known and experienced, that here and now there is no death or grief or fear so deep and dark that the voice of Jesus cannot reach into it, call us out, and bring life.”* Amen.

⁴<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/all-saints-day/commentary-on-john-1132-44-3>