

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

All Saints Day - Year B

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Isaiah 25:6-9

Psalm 24

Revelation 21:1-6a

John 11:32-44

11/03/2024

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

32 When 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." 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34 He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." 35 Jesus began to weep. 36 So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" 38 Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39 Jesus 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." 40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" 41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42 I 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." 43 When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The 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.

Death Defeated

Good morning! Our story today is about two people. And so we’re jumping right in. This is a story I’ve told before, but it bears repeating. I think I approached this text like most people for all of my life until seminary. Then I met Debbie. She was the assistant to the Provost at Southern, and because I delivered the mail around campus we would often chat. Debbie did not like this text. She had lost a loved one and came in to worship on All Saints Day and couldn’t help but wonder why Jesus brought his friend to life, but her loved one had died.

It’s a tough question. And because I was just the mail delivery guy I didn’t feel compelled to give her the “right” answer. Instead we dwelled on that question together, each of us knowing that we didn’t have the answer, but knowing that maybe that was ok. But her pain and frustration has changed how I have seen this story for a decade now.

But then I listened to Pastor Colleen. Now, I am not saying that Debbie was wrong, her pain was real, and her struggle was the struggle of many who have read that story. But Pastor Colleen, like all good friends, showed me a different way. You have met Pastor Colleen, she is the director for communications at the Virginia Synod, she’s my age and usually sits with Megan when she stays.

But Pastor Colleen is also the called minister of a digital ministry that exists solely online. It's called All Places Together. She publishes a podcast series and earlier this month started a new series titled "Who is God?" And for her first episode she tackled this very scripture. She takes us past what we might already know, which I still think is important to recap.

In the Gospel of John we hear about Martha, Mary, and Lazarus a good bit. They seem to be friends of Jesus, and they live just outside of Jerusalem in Bethany. Jesus has put off coming to see Lazarus when he was sick, even after others come and report that his friend is deathly ill. Jesus seems to wait. Jesus finally heads toward the city as he heads towards Jerusalem, towards his ultimate goal. But Lazarus dies, and Jesus doesn't see his friend before it happens. Jesus has healed so many people, done so many amazing things, and yet he misses this chance. So, understandably, Mary is upset. "*32 When 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."* Ouch. That's a rebuke if I have ever heard one.

They are taken to the tomb and Jesus asks for the stone to be rolled away. I love this detail about Martha, because she's the pragmatic one that I think a lot of us can empathize with. This man has been dead for four days, and all of us can imagine the harsh reality that bodies decompose, fast. Martha points out that once they crack that tomb open, it's gonna smell. But they have trusted Jesus through even crazier things, so they give it a go here too.

But it's here that we shift back to Pastor Colleen, because she does something interesting. For so many of us, especially in our grief, we connect with Martha and Mary in the story. But in reality, WE are Lazarus. We will die. Listen to what she says as Lazarus emerges from the tomb. "*Lazarus*

walks out or more likely hobbles out because he's bound in grave clothes. Fabric is tied around him, and Jesus invites the disciples, his sisters, to get him loose. Jesus loves Lazarus back to life, and I believe he does the same for us time and time again, over the course of our lives. When we are in the tomb of grief, addiction, or uncertainty of any kind, Jesus calls to us and shows us the way to new life. One breath at a time, one hobble at a time, one glimpse of hope at a time. Through holy conversation, through acts of love, through prayer, through sermons and podcasts, through time spent in creation, through journaling and reflecting, through working the 12 steps, and by simply making it through a day. Jesus' love is made known to us, and we continue to live.”¹

We are all dying. And yet we are all being called to new life through Jesus Christ too! Today we observe All Saints Day, a day where we confess our Lutheran belief that all baptized Christians are saints of God. And so we mourn those dearly beloved that we have lost whose names float above us now. For many of us, that pain might be new, freshly made. Others grieve with a dull ache. But we all grieve.

God loves ALL of us into this life, all Saints. Like Revelation points out: *“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; 4 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.”* This vision of “the end” is this beautiful reminder that heaven comes down to us, that God comes to us! And the wonderful thing is that God doesn’t dismiss

¹ From All Places Together: Who is God? The One Who Loves Us to Life, Oct 6, 2024
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our pain, God doesn't belittle the grief we have had. Instead God changes things and makes it so that we feel that suffering no longer.

So we grieve now, yes. But know this, God has loved you into a new and wonderful life where we come together once again with those that we lost. What a beautiful thing. Amen.