

Today is one of the principle feasts of the Church and one of the few we are permitted to celebrate on the following Sunday. All Saints Day is always November first, and this year it happily falls on a Sunday. We also wrap into our celebration of All Saints Day, All Souls Day which always falls on November 2. Our understanding of these two feasts are similar to, but not identical to those of our brothers and sisters in the Roman tradition.

All Saints is another way of saying “the communion of saints” which is defined by our catechism as “the whole family of God, the living and the dead, those whom we love and those whom we hurt, bound together in Christ by sacrament, prayer, and praise.” (BCP, 862) So it is more than just some wonderful, righteous, devout person, it is each and every person in this room, in every church, in any one who confesses Christ as Lord, both living and dead. When we are baptized and when we confirm or reaffirm our baptismal promises, as we will do shortly, we confess that we believe in the communion of saints.

In expressing this corporate belief, we are saying that we trust the witness of those who have gone before us and with those who walk this journey with us contemporaneously. We trust that the Church has acted as the body of Christ through the ages, continues to do so, and will do so in

the age to come. We can express this belief even though we know that the Church has acted shamefully, sinfully, and hurtfully across time. As a human organization these behaviors occur, and the Holy Spirit enables us to transcend our shortcomings and enables us to be the body of Christ in the world. The Church at her best sees to the needs of a broken world and has since our inception.

All Souls Day focuses on just a portion of the Saints, those saints who have died. By tradition, we pray for those who have died since last All Saints Day. Those of us in the Anglican tradition pray for the dead “because we still hold them in our love, and because we trust that in God’s presence those who have chosen to serve him will grow in his love, until they see him as he is.” (BCP, 862.) We believe then, that even after we have died, we continue to be perfected in God’s love.

Our readings today touch on the intersection of life and death, they seek to capture the mystery of eternal life in the language of poetry and metaphor for both life and death are within the scope of God’s love. The creation stories in Genesis tell us that God never intended God’s creation to die, and in Jesus’ life, death and resurrection we have come to

understand that although we could not do it for ourselves, God has ensured that all creation will have the eternal life intended for us all.

This does not mean that death is easy or devoid of pain, for either the one who is dying or for those who stand by helpless to stop the process of dying and who will be left behind. Each of the names prayed for today are people who were deeply loved and whose absence leaves a real void for those of us left behind. Our English translation of John weakens the meaning of Jesus' grief. In the Greek, Jesus experiences a passion and pain that comes from anger at Lazarus' situation. Jesus hurts almost to the point of being physically sickened and disturbed. (Ginger Barfield: [https://workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2660](https://workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2660)) Grief is like that. And gradually, gradually, the pain of loss ebbs, not in a tidy way, not even in a completely predictable way. The void will still be there. It never goes away. For those of us who have lost a near relative, such as a parent, a spouse, a child, there is life before and there is life after and the life after is different.

Each of us have been touched by death - we can't escape it. Here, whether we knew her or not, we have been impacted by our rector Sherrill Page's death. To hear her prayed for might make grief arise afresh. To

hear any of our loved ones prayed for might make grief arise afresh. I hope you let it. I hope you don't stuff it and don't try to retain composure. Grief is highly individualized and as much as our culture demands it, we can't and we don't "get over it." As part of the communion of saints, we bear each other's burdens and we grieve with you. We love you, we will hold you, and by our presence we will help you bear up. That's what we do as a Christian community.

John pulls no punches when he lets us know that death stinks, both literally and metaphorically. He shows us that even in the face of death, our hope resides in the power of the cross and in the resurrection of first Christ and then each of us, in the paradox that even though we die, we will live.

In preparing for today's sermon I came across a lovely passage from Hubert Northcott, in his book *The Venture of Prayer*. Hubert Northcott was English and the son of an Anglican priest and a monk in the last century. Under a heading entitled "The Joy of Meeting Those for Whom We have Prayed" he writes: *Perhaps one of the joys reserved for us hereafter will be to learn what became of our intercessions, and to meet the souls they supported in time of need. And for ourselves, there will be the joy of*

*meeting those who have prayed for us, and so of realizing from a new angle our share in the Communion of Saints. If so, we may learn then how much the Church owes, and we ourselves as member of it, to the artless prayers uttered by simple child-like souls, the value of whose intercession we should have little suspected. [Excerpt from Loves Redeeming Work, the Anglican Quest for Holiness, compiled by Geoffrey Rowell, Kenneth Stevenson & Rowan Williams, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 610]*

I am particularly taken by his turn of phrase with “our share in the Communion of Saints.” Part of our share, as I said, is to share each other’s burdens as well as our joys. Prayer matters. Walking with one another in our journey of faith matters. Our corporate life as part of the body of Christ for these last 2000 plus years matters. Today after this gathering around Christ’s table, we will have our last of three conversations around our future in the body of Christ. No matter how we chose to go forward, we are all permanently part of the body of Christ. We have been marked and sealed as Christ’s own at our baptism forever.

At the end of our Gospel reading, Jesus orders that Lazarus be unbound. Jesus empowers us also to be unbound. When the gauze is metaphorically taken from our head and our hands and feet, we may find

ourselves heading in a new direction, takiing on new ministries or reinvigorating our current ministries. Let us give thanks to God that renewal of life awaits us.

AMEN