

Isaiah 25: 6-9

John 11:32-44

Revelation 21:1-6a

“This is the Lord for who we have waited;  
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”  
AMEN!

There’s an old saying, “Dead men tell no tales,”  
and it means that once a person’s dead,  
then they’re dead.

You don’t need to worry about them, or  
think about what they might say or do,  
you don’t need to even worry about them at all.

And as I was thinking about that old saying,  
I thought about the Bible.

How the writers of Isaiah, Revelation,  
and John’s gospel... of every book or letter  
in the Bible - the writers are all dead.

Yet, their witness still proclaims.

They still tell tales.

Then I thought about how we celebrated  
Reformation Sunday last week and recalled  
that the reformer Martin Luther and  
Katie Luther and the Melanchthon family,  
with many others - are still speaking  
words through music,

theological writings,  
and documented witnesses to us.

I thought about how we see and hear them still,  
even in their imperfections, they are still  
very much a part of us and are still speaking.

Think about the marvelous hymns we sing,  
the composers that lead us during worship  
and telling their story.

Music and words speak powerful stories to us,  
music helps us to memorize scripture and  
music often fractures our hearts just enough  
to let grace and love pour into them.

We might not even read the composer's names at  
the bottom of the page but they still speak to us  
and are very much a part of us.

Think of St. Stephen's own historical documents  
and pictures and testimonies.

Past preachers, pastors, leaders, disciples, apostles...  
we are indebted to them and their testimonies.

This place, this ground and these walls we  
have inherited from their sacrifices; and  
from their commitments, and we inherited all  
of this from their love of Christ.

Doesn't that still speak to us?

They do still tell us stories. (Pause)

This is the answer to why we dedicate  
this Sunday in special recognition as  
All Saints Sunday.

We commemorate today all of those  
who have preceded us.

We remember their names and their legacies.

We also give space for the grief  
we experience from our loss.

We Americans aren't so good at  
leaving space for grief.

Seldom do we wash our dead,  
dress them for burial, or  
dig their graves.

Our culture rarely spends time doing  
these important rituals.

At almost every every graveside service I have done,  
there is always included artificial turf that even  
hides the stark-naked earth.

The casket is not even lowered until everyone departs.

We think that by avoiding these necessary rituals  
we are rescued from death, but really  
we hurt ourselves by taking away

the sacred time that gives space for us  
to grieve and follow the important rituals.

It is like we aren't even given permission  
to recognize the trauma of death. (Pause)

Beloved, we have permission to grieve today.

This is safe space for you to face  
the grief and trauma of death.

No one remembers the pastor's sermon on  
All Saints Sunday but everyone remembers  
the lighting of their candle.

Especially the first time the candle is lit in honor of  
the memory for the one who died.

These grief rituals must take place. (Pause)

The extension of grief right now is intense because  
on top of what I have just said we recognize  
that these last months have been really hard.

We can take a deep breathe and acknowledge that.

There are around 750,000 people dead

from Covid in the United States and 5 million dead  
in the world from the disease.

We encountered Covid at our last All Saints Sunday  
but we had the distraction of an important  
election right around the corner in 2020 and  
that took up a lot of our attention.

The collective grief of being separated  
and acknowledging the lives lost from  
the disease was complicated,  
so we put it aside.

In many cases, the shock of not being able  
to sit at the side of the ones we love as  
they died caused an even greater  
disconnect to the reality of death.

This year, even though the pandemic still drags on,  
even though we have effective vaccines that  
have allowed life to return to some  
resemblance of regularity,

we honor the collective burden of all those deaths  
and their weight on our hearts.

We will acknowledged that pain today with  
the lighting of 5 candles for the five million  
that died from Covid. (Pause)

This is not all we do, of course.

Today is not simply a day to mourn the losses of  
the ones we love.

We also give thanks for their lives and  
for their work and for their witness.

We also proclaim faith in the One who continues  
to hold them and to the One who continues  
to hold us.

In the promises from Isaiah this morning  
we internalize how God will destroy the shroud  
cast over all people and will swallow up  
death forever.

Our reading began with a great feast.

The great feast is significant because  
this text was written before money existed.

Historians tell that silver was used during some trading  
but a monetary system did not exist.

So, the image of abundance during that day was  
a great feast where the best food and  
the finest wines were given for all people.

The tradition of the feast is also such  
an important ritual following  
the death of loved ones.

People bring food and presence.

In the midst of loss and grief we celebrate  
what God has provided. (Pause)

In the text from Revelation, we read how  
the “first things” pass away.

The first things are those sources of suffering.

All of the things that serve as sources of death,  
crying, grief, and pain they will all die.

Revelation is a spoiler alert that keeps speaking to us  
as we hear how the end of the story will unfold  
and knowing how the story will end is the key

to living through the first things right now.

We are not told that it is possible to avoid suffering,  
rather we are given hope and strength to live into  
and through that suffering as followers of  
Christ unto the very end. (Pause)

We, as a community, can do this.

There is space here as we stand on  
the shoulders of those  
who lived and died before us.

The shortened section we read from John's gospel  
brings us to the focus of who we are and why  
we do what we do.

We cannot help but understand that those  
who preceded us in death have moved  
to a higher plane than those of us who remain.

They know for sure that physical death is not the end,  
we are left to dwell in the mystery still.

So as Mary and Martha were understandably distraught  
at the death of their brother, Lazarus.

We too are understandable distraught and  
make the same plea.

Lord Jesus, if you were here our  
brother, sister, sibling, wife, husband,  
child, grandparent, or friend would not  
have died.

We still deal with the earthly challenges,  
but the saints no longer do and we can  
shift our focus to the ways they still  
make contributions to our lives even today.

We are not alone, no person is an island and  
death is not the end!

The great devourer death will one day itself



be swallowed up forever.

You need to hear it and I need to hear it too.

Now we can live it!

AMEN!