

John 11:32-44  
All Saints Sunday  
November 7, 2021

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

I have a love-hate relationship with the final episode of the long-running NBC television show Friends. I love it because in it I see a reflection of life. There are moments of joy recollecting the many wonderful moments these six friends shared in that New York apartment. The laughter they shared together and brought to millions of people who joined with them on a weekly basis. There is one of the most heart-warming moments when Ross and Rachel finally get back together again. There is also sorrow and tears knowing things are going to be different. Saying good-bye to a place they called home for the past nine years. I have probably watched that episode a dozen times if not more and it still moves me, my throat gets a lump in it, and tears sometime well up in my eyes. As that apartment door closes for the last time, it highlights the fact while the door on one chapter of their lives is closing, the door to a new chapter is opening. What I do not love so much is we never get the end of the story as it pertains to Ross and Rachel. Did they ever get married or not? I guess we'll never know the full story.

There is no love-hate relationship with this morning's passage from John. It, too, reflects life in the flesh full of agony, tears, raw emotions, surprises and what surely must have been sheer elation, joy, and amazement when Lazarus was brought back to life. In the beginning of his gospel, John tells his hearers, "The Word became flesh and lived among us." (1:14) Well, it does not get fleshier than this. Further, Jesus makes it a certainty we know the full story, the open door to a new chapter in the lives of God's people that He will most fully reveal through his own death and resurrection.

It's brought into light and beautifully painted through John's words in the book of Revelation.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away ... I heard loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; <sup>4</sup>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." (21:1-4 NRSV)

The prophet Isaiah lives on in these words as we heard him writing to Israel in a dark moment in their storied life as God's people as the Assyrians were besieging Jerusalem.

<sup>7</sup>And he (God) will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. <sup>8</sup>Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.

Our passage may show the fullness of Jesus' humanity. He grieves to the depths of his inmost core. He is deeply moved, disturbed. Perhaps even angered as can also be read into the verb translated "disturbed." The Word made flesh that lived among us may have been angered by the ongoing

stranglehold death has on God's people. And of course, "Jesus wept" as the NIV translates verse thirty-five. The shortest verse in the Bible; yet is one of the most powerful and a true look into the heart of Jesus, which is none other than the heart of God, because we recollect John's opening verse that the Word was in the beginning. The Word was with God. The Word was God.

Yes, this passages shows the humanity of Jesus but it also shows his divinity. It reveals God's heart. Assuredly God is there in our moments of joy and laughter. God is there in all the good times celebrating and rejoicing. Yet, God is also most certainly there in the moments of deep pain and sorrow. God is deeply moved. God grieves. God weeps. God enters the stench of death.

All Saints Sunday is a festival in the life of Christ's church in which we remember the beloved saints who have died in the faith and now rest from their labors. It is day in which the church collectively gathers together, surrounded by those precious saints, and proclaims the promise in verse five of the first chapter of John, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." It is when we find ourselves caught between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Death is before us. The names of the saints of Bethany who have died in the past year, Helen Petersen and John Crow, are spoken and the names of those saints who are precious and beloved to us will be placed upon on the baptismal font. A remembrance of the new life we have in Christ. The emotions are still very raw for some of us. Tears may well up; even as we recall those saints who died many years ago. This is natural and normal.

Like Mary and others, there may be questions we still long answers for. Why did my loved one have to die? Why so soon? Was there more that I could have done? Why is one person asymptomatic from the COVID-19 and another one gets deathly ill? Why is the stench of death still all too real?

While those questions remain, one question is most assuredly is answered through our biblical texts today. Is there life after death? Does God have the power to overcome it? Will the prediction Jesus will raise from the dead in three days become reality? The answer is an unequivocal yes. A new chapter beyond the perceived closed doors of death will prevail. The words of Jesus found in chapter 5 (v.25), "Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" are brought into the light through Jesus' raising of Lazarus. The promise spoken by Jesus in 11:25, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live" becomes reality.

Beloved saints gathered today, surrounded by all the saints who have gone before us, we live by these words. Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again. On this day and every day, the light shines among us, within us, and through us. Let us go forth therefore and proclaim to the world the good news that the story of God and God's people will never be closed by a rock at a tomb, the stench of death will never prevail but instead the empty tomb, the fragrant scent of flowers in the garden, the light of resurrection dawn, and the words of Revelation will, "Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away. ... See I am making all things new."