

All Saints Sunday
Sermon Text: John 11:32-44
Related text: Isaiah 25:6-9
Revelation 21:1-6
Date Preached: November 1, 2009

Grace to you and peace from God, who wipes away the tears from our eyes. Amen.

This festival of All Saints gives the church the opportunity to remember in a variety of ways, those who have died throughout this year. We are not the only congregation to celebrate this festival. We are not the only congregation to remember individuals who have died. What we do is add our voice to the multitude of other voices as we give thanks to God for the witness of the saints. We give thanks as a congregation for these particular saints we remember in our worship today.

This festival does however offer an opportunity that some of us might just as well want to avoid. It is the opportunity to remember the loved ones among us who are still grieving. The funeral is over. Everyone else seems to have moved on. That is not necessarily the case.

The widow cries when she goes through the belongings of her deceased husband, determining what can be given away to others who are in need. In some cases this

might be the fifth or sixth time she has started this project only to find it is too difficult.

An adult child begins to cry at church when the hymn that was played at mother's funeral is sung. Birthdays and anniversaries open doors for feelings of sadness and sorrow to find expression.

No one is immune to the feeling of loss. Jesus, fully human, weeps with Mary and Martha as they take him to the grave of his dear friend Lazarus. Jesus is not a divine being immune to the emotions of grief that we experience. By being present with Mary, Martha and this community, by developing a friendship with Lazarus, there is a bond that exists much in the same way that we have bonds with family members and friends.

Having invested in these relationships Jesus opens himself to experience grief, sorrow, and a host of other emotions common with death. At the same time, Jesus is fully aware of what is about to take place. Jesus is fully aware that once he speaks the words, "Lazarus, come out." Lazarus will come out. The burial wrappings, the four days of being in the tomb, are not enough to resist the life God gives.

Yet, even our Lord weeps. Such weeping provides an important witness for us. It gives witness that even as people who believe in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting, we can still cry.

Such is the boldness of our faith that we can with the strength of the Holy Spirit, come together at the funeral home, at the church, or at the grave side and with tears in our eyes proclaim the hope we have of new life in Christ.

In Christ, death loses. The raising of Lazarus is a sign that death does not have the last word. That word belongs to God. That word is life, and for us that life is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It is this hope that is given expression in the readings from Isaiah and Revelation. The hope comes in the promise of God to wipe away every tear from our eyes. "Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

We are still living in these first things. Yet our tears are ones of hope. These tears are hope filled tears for we have entrusted our loved ones into God's eternal care.

Tears of hope make it possible for us to comfort one another in the days, weeks and months following a loved one's death. Our bereavement group invites the tears to flow as we embody Christ's presence with each other. We do so not taking away tears, but holding before each other the hope we have in Jesus.

This festival of All saints gives us opportunity to see that our relationship with each other goes beyond the confines of this world. It is eternal. Not because we desire it. It is eternal because of the gift of Jesus.

As people of faith, we deeply believe in the communion of saints. Each Sunday we gather not only with each other but with the whole communion of saints of every time and place.

Our tears are not only ones of grief. The tears we shed we do so in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life.

It is this hope that encourages us in this life. It is this hope that helps us in our sorrow, to believe that Christ will one day wipe the tears from our eyes, and we will join the community of saints among whom there is no more mourning and crying and where death is no more.