**Translation, Understanding & the Elephant of All Saints**

**2nd Peter 1:1-18**

Today is not only the twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost, but it is also All Saints Sunday. And I must admit after initially reviewing today’s reading I was really struggling with how to interpret it and what to preach. I know it would have been way too easy to just focus on All Saints Sunday solely, and not even provide education or insight into the reading. However, I did not want to cheat myself or any of you in the congregation by not moving along in our New Testament studies this year.

So, first off let me ask you this. Have any of you ever read anything and kind of stared at it, or read back on it and really not grasped or understood what you read? For myself these struggles with comprehending and understanding have all too often or not been chalked up to some kind of undiagnosed learning disability or something. If you ask my wife my favorite things to do is get out one of my various colored Bible highlighters and make what I feel is important pop out on the page for later review. I enjoy reading, and often read to learn and grow, but sometimes I am just honestly battling the confusion and over analysis that goes on in my head.

Unfortunately, just like a book or article the Bible in a certain version does not permit us the ability to understand. It can trip us up by the certain wording or flow of speech. Translation is a tricky thing. Thankfully, there are several other translations of the Bible out there. We can use that to our advantage and read, compare, and analyze more thoroughly.

So, you might be thinking to yourself, get on with it Vince, tell me what you highlighted, or made note of from the reading. Okay, are you ready with your pen and note pads? Just kidding, but in all seriousness you can take notes if you want. So, here we go.

The first thing I noticed was that Simon Peter was writing to everyone who shared with him and the apostles “in the privilege of believing that our God and Savior Jesus Christ will do what is just and fair.” He called us to “keep learning more and more about God and our Lord Jesus.” Simon Peter reminded us that “we have everything we need to live a life that pleases God.” He informed us that “God made great and marvelous promises, so we could become one with Him, and we could escape our evil desires and the corrupt influence of the world.”

Simon Peter wants us to add to our tool belts so that we are prepared to go out into the world and follow our call. He encourages you to “Improve your faith by adding goodness, understanding, self-control, patience, devotion to God, concern for others, and love.” Just like you add your tools into your belt so you can work on a project, you can add Goodness as it pertains to virtuous courses of thought and action. Understanding is all about learning about the Bible, God, Jesus, and faith. Self-Control is the mastering of one’s desires and sinful appetites. With Patience there comes steadfastness in faith and consistency with Godly things. When we exhibit devotion to God it is about the reverence and respect shown towards God, and our faithfulness towards Him. Our Concern for others includes the love towards our brothers and sisters in faith, and our love towards others. Lastly, and not the least, is Love which includes our absolute love for God and for others. Each one of these seven areas the Apostle Simon Peter lays out as a pathway away from spiritual blindness towards seeing God and spiritual issues clearly.

He goes on tells us that “Growing shows appreciation. However, not growing shows that you lack vision and that you have forgotten the blessing of being forgiven your sins.” Simon Peter encourages us to “Show out and show God that you appreciate being chosen and selected by Him.” He informs us that “The apostles knew and witnessed the glory, love, and pleasure from God for his Son.”

Now, let’s focus on the big elephant in the room today. I want to diffuse any discomfort any one of you may have, and I want to offer my understanding and sympathy. Let’s transform this elephant into an understanding, just like we did with our reading today.

There is a lot of meaning packed into the word all, in All Saints. All includes some most beloved to us. All Saints calls to mind specific individuals: particular beloved faces, names and memories. All includes those beloved by others. All Saints creates a space that embraces with honor the multitudes of individuals among the beloved dead. We see their faces, say their names, and recognize in the worshipers around us others who carry their own memories and litanies of saints. All Saints sets out a place for all of them—an assembly the book of Revelation describes as “a number no one could count” with saints “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages.” All Saints brings into focus our own beloved dead while also stretching our imagination toward the whole company of saints, more diverse and populous than we can fully comprehend.

We are reminded that all are saved by grace. The festival originally honored those who were considered especially holy: heroic figures from the Scriptures and martyrs who had given their lives nonviolently in witness to the faith. However, it is an especially Lutheran accent for the feast to honor not only those who lived exemplary lives, but all who have been baptized into Christ’s death. For Lutherans, All Saints resonates with the conviction that in Christ every saint is a sinner and every sinner a saint. Lutherans especially remember on this feast that it is God’s grace, apart from our works, that makes us saints. We find lasting rest only in the mercy of God.

We share a mortal, earthy nature with all humans and all living creatures on the planet. Death is an inevitable part of life for all of us. It is part of our citizenship as earth creatures. In the Bible’s wisdom literature, the word all is like a bell ringing to remind us of the lesson of Ash Wednesday: The fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath…. All go to one place; all are from the dust, all turn to dust again. All Saints proclaims a mystery. We remain in communion with those who have returned to the earth ahead of us. All Saints reimagines the world—all of it. Even in death, God is making all things new.

This proverbial elephant is the memory and sorrow we experience today on All Saints Day for those that have passed on. Whether their death was too early, because of an illness, or even at a time in our lives that we still wanted or needed this person to be with us. We can be mad at God for some time, and that is okay. But, we also need to realize they were called back to Him for bigger and better things that we cannot fathom. Unfortunately, it just was not our choice or timing as to why God has called them.

As we needed to reset our clocks today and fall back an hour. This falling back may have allowed us a little extra sleep; but it also is important to fall back in order to remember the family, friends, and church members we have laid to rest in the past year. We will read the names of those who are greatly missed later during this service. Their memories and impact on our lives will be honored by tolling the bell in our prayers of intercession.

I also happened to fall back and focus on those that have passed away since my wife and I joined Holy Spirit Lutheran Church just a few years ago. These folks were pillars in this church community, their families, and I am sure they were pillars in the larger community they lived in as well.

Bill McDowell was one of the first people that greeted myself and my wife when we entered this church, and he knew the history and story of almost everyone in these pews. Linda Schubert was the heart and soul of Sunday school, gardening, and so many other things. Emma Lazaruk focused on our choir and the beautiful music for each worship service. Tim Worrell provided knowledge and experience into so many things, and he was always interested in what was going on in the church. Joanne Saxe was our former Pastor, colleague, friend, and so much more. Mac McKenna could talk to you about almost anything, and always cracked me up by filling me in about what local place had a buffet recently or coming up. Leo Kinka showed me how being connected at the hip to his wife really worked. Jim Brannan became a great friend who helped Ed and myself with several projects around the church. Marge Elliott managed to corral Leon and all of his shenanigans, among other things. Pat Braddock was only a member of our church family for a short time, but she became a quick friend to many people here. Melody Murphy taught me the flow of the church office, the art of listening, and the flow of the people and this church.

These are just a few of the many Saints who have sat in these church pews. Nonetheless, each and every one of these Saints has further shaped my life, the church, and countless other people and things. The most important part is that we continue to toll their bell in our memories and actions when we leave here today. We get the opportunity to show out and show God that we appreciate being chosen and selected by Him and the Saints he has put in our lives over the years.

AMEN