**Sermon 11/4/18**

**Gospel Reading John 11:32-44**

It was a hot and muggy summer day.

The woman put all her groceries on the back seat of her car.

The car felt like an over and she quickly got into the driver’s seat,

anxious to crank up the air conditioning.

She was anxious to get home, put everything away, and relax.

Before she could put the key into the ignition, she heard a loud bang.

Then she felt a sharp pain in the back of her head.

She reached back and felt a warm sticky substance on the back of her head.

She realizes she had been shot.

She held her hands tightly against the back of her head as she felt the oozing

warmth sliding down her neck.

Her life flashed in front of her eyes – all the things she had done, and not done,

all the people she was leaving behind.

The tears began to fall from her eyes.

A man walking past saw her. He stopped and asked, “Are you OK?”

The woman answered, “I’ve been shot in the head, & I’m holding my brains in.”

He opened her door and reached in to help her.

He discovered it wasn’t her brains sliding through her hair. It was dough.

Because of the heat, a Pillsbury biscuit canister had exploded in the back seat,

making a loud explosion similar to a gunshot,

and shooting dough all over the back of the woman’s head.

Like this woman, at some point,

we all have to come to terms with our own mortality.

And as much as we wish not to think about it,

we have to face the mortality of our friends and loved ones.

Today is All Saints’ Sunday.

It is a day when we pause and remember those who are no longer with us.

It is a day to take the time to look around us and notice all the Saints around

us who have loved and supported us during the difficult times in our lives.

But what is a Saint?

One day a man was walking through a beautiful church building

with his 4-year-old son.

As they walked, the young boy looked around, noticing everything.

He stopped and was curious about the stained-glass windows

which looked so beautiful with their bright colors.

As he looked at the windows, he asked:

“Who are all the people in the windows, Daddy?”

“They are Saints,” said the father.

“What are Saints Daddy?” the boy asked.

The father was stuck.

How was he going to explain who saints were to a four-year-old boy?

As the boy was still looking up at the windows,

and the father was still wondering how he would explain who saints are,

the young boy shouted out: “I know who Saints are daddy.

They are the people that the light shines through.”

We are the Saints.

We are the ones who allow God’s light to shine through us

into the dark spaces of the lives of those around us.

Today we remember and honor those who are no longer with us.

We remember how they let God’s light & love shine through them into our lives.

We look around us, and thank God for the great cloud of witnesses

who are still with us, who let God’s light and peace and joy

shine through them, into our lives today.

And we remember that each of us is one of God’s Saints,

reaching out with the story of God’s great love for us,

to those who need to hear the story again.

Fred Craddock told a story about visiting his father

who was dying of throat cancer in a hospital in Nashville.

When he got there his dad was taking a nap, & so he started looking at the flowers, cards from Sunday school classes, church circles, the Youth Group, the Choir -- just about every group in the church had remembered his daddy.

Fred said that the remarkable thing was his dad didn’t go to church.

His mom was active in the church, but his dad saw no need for it.

Fred said that when his dad woke up he smiled and reached out his hand,

because he could no longer speak.

After a while his dad took out a pencil and on the back of a Kleenex Box:

“I was wrong about the church.”

Fred Craddock’s father had not recognized how important the church was.

He didn’t realize until the end of his life how important the Saints were.

The church is where the Saints are strengthened, and empowered,

to let the light shine through them into the lives of others.

Fred was so glad his father experienced the love of others, and the love of God,

before he died.

His father died surrounded by the love and caring of the Saints around him,

finally experiencing God’s great love for him.

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were basically Jesus’ best friends.

Their house was a home away from home for Jesus.

He ate dinner there. He relaxed. He laughed. He shared life.

And when Lazarus became sick, Mary and Martha sent for Jesus.

When Jesus arrived and saw the sisters weeping, he began to weep.

God’s Son broke into tears.

In spite of knowing what He’ll do,

He grieved with them, at His friend’s death, and the sisters’ loss.

Not only is Jesus the healer of our pain, but he is the feeler of our pain.

When we hurt, he hurts. When we are sad, he is sad.

When we grieve, he grieves. When we cry, he cries with us.

When we rejoice, he rejoices with us.

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb.

And he said: “Take away the stone.”

Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

He could have waved his hand and the stone would have disappeared.

But he invited others to participate in the miracle –

and he still invites us to be part of the Father’s work in this world.

We are included in God’s work. We have a part to play in his miracles.

It is our task to help take away the stones in people’s lives;

to help them experience God’s great love, and peace, and joy, and life.

Then Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.”

When Lazarus came out, Jesus said to those present:

“Unbind him, and let him go.” And they did.

Jesus calls us to participate in his work.

Every day he provides us with many opportunities to love and care for others.

Earlier in the story

When Jesus told Martha:

Did I not tell you, if you believed, you would see the glory of God?

He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.

Whoever lives and believes in me will never die.

I am the resurrection and the life.

Do you believe this?

This is the question that every one of us must answer for ourselves.

And how we answer this question determines how we will live our lives.

How we answer this question decides whether or not

we will be people who let God’s light shine through them.

Two little birds had a nest in the bushes in the back part of the garden.

Julia found the nest. It had four speckled eggs in it.

One day, after she had been away some time,

she ran into the garden to take a peep at the speckled eggs.

Instead of beautiful eggs, there were only broken, empty shells.

“Oh!” she cried, picking out the pieces,

“the beautiful eggs are all spoiled and broken!”

“No, Julia,” said her brother; “They are not spoiled.

The best part of them has taken wing, and flown away.”

So it is in death: the body left behind is only an empty shell;

while its soul, the better part, has taken wings, and flown away,

to be with our Heavenly Father – forever.

AMEN