

All Saints Year B
Isaiah 25:6-9, Rev 21:1-6a, John 11:32-44
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All the Saints

One of my personal joys of being part of the Episcopal church is our liturgical life: the calendar with its seasons which lead us through the life and teachings of Jesus; having Scripture at the center of all we do, and the way we physically move and engage during the liturgy, literally embodying what we believe in how we worship and pray. These practices come into even sharper focus for me during the celebration of the Feast of All Saints, when we gather together, like we did this past Wednesday evening, as well as today, to remember all those who have gone before us.

I love that we take the time to recognize our deep, continuing connection to those who are no longer with us in this world — in prayers, worship, and song — recognizing our desire to stay close and keep alive the memories of those we so dearly remember. So today, I want to share with you just a few things that are especially meaningful for me, in the hope that you too may find something new to hold onto gently about our lives lived within the vast communion of saints, as we strive together to follow Christ.

First, did anyone notice a change in today's readings? We all had an extra hour of sleep last night, so I'm hoping you're particularly alert! All Saints marks a shift in our focus. We are moving from hearing about Jesus' daily teachings towards the future and a time known only by God. These final weeks of Ordinary time, the last weeks after the Pentecost, are preparing us for Advent and the anticipation of the One who is to come and the end times, the time of the Second Coming.

We heard about this view of the future in our lesson from Isaiah, with its description of the great heavenly banquet and its rich food, well-aged wines, and a promise of the time when the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all our faces. Sorrow, pain, and grief will be no more. The reading from Revelation reinforces this theme, as it tells of the time when all will be made new, the new Jerusalem.

And then there's that marvelous sign of new life in the gospel of John with the story of Lazarus. Jesus, who is both light and life, has raised Lazarus from the dead, allowing us a glimpse of the new reality of Jesus' saving promise — what Jesus will do when glorified through his death and resurrection. This reading blesses us with a foretaste of the resurrection of all who in live in Christ, our hope for eternal life with all those who have gone before us.

While today's lessons guide us towards a future focused on hope, in the liturgy we also take the time to look at our past. We pause to remember all those who have gone before us. We remember those big saints, saints with a *Capital S*, whose very lives were testimonies to Jesus Christ in both word and deed. But just as important, we also remember those past saints from our own lives — those closer to home — who carried Christ's light in more subtle ways: the grandmother who shared the secret family recipes; the parent who taught us to play ball and hike and fish; the spouse who helped us to build a family that is uniquely our own; our beloved child, gone far too soon, who changed our lives forever; that friend in Christ who somehow

always managed to be there at just the right time. We take the time to recognize all the beloved who have gone before us. In community, we share in the loss and sorrow, while also standing together in the light of what is to come. We remember our deep connection to those brothers and sisters in faith who have gone before us.

But there's also something else happening today on the Feast of All Saints — there's more involved than the future and the past. We don't just experience those separate ends of a spectrum but have the chance to experience how these seemingly distinct parts of our human experience are also intricately and marvelously interwoven. Today we also remember what draws us together into community and covenant in Christ: the waters of baptism. Today is one of the four principle feasts of the church year when we are encouraged to baptize and, if on a day like today that there is no baptism, we join together in renewing our Baptismal covenant.

Why do we do this?

Because baptism is our gateway, our entry point into community and covenant in Christ. It's through the waters of baptism that we are buried with Christ in his death, raised to share in his resurrection, and reborn by the Spirit. You'll recall that during each baptismal liturgy, the congregation is asked "Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ?" And together we respond "WE WILL," agreeing both to support and receive the newly baptized into the covenant community of the faithful.

When today we renew our baptismal vows, remember that our walk with Christ is not only personal, but within community. We are not baptized alone, nor are we expected to live out our Christian lives on our own. Our community of faith extends beyond the walls of any church, for it includes all faithful believers who have ever lived and worshipped our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our covenant community is not just those we see, but all those of the body of Christ: those who live today; those who lived, but have gone before us; and those who are yet to come.

In Baptism we are bound together as the communion of saints — members of the whole family of God, the living and the dead, linked together in Christ. We and all the communion of saints are one, and we are mystically present together as we join in worship and praise and at the Lord's table. And at times, if we open our hearts and minds, we may be blessed by the Spirit to actually feel the presence of those not seen, but who are still with us, as we join together in sacrament, prayer, and praise.

The celebration of the Feast of All Saints encourages us to lean into the hope of the future and new life to come; while also recalling our past and all the saints who have gone before us; yet encouraging us to engage where we are today, by recognize Christ's call for us to live our lives in fellowship and community with all God's beloved children.

We, God's people, are all knit together in one communion and fellowship in unity with Christ. We're called to recognize God's presence in all we meet and share Christ's light in the world. For whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's, for Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Amen.