



Pastor Gwen's Message
 All Saints Sunday
 "Death Defying"
 Sunday November 7, 2021

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

Today is All Saints Sunday, one of our feast days in the Christian church. And so, what do you think of when I say the word Saint? For those of you who come from the Roman Catholic background, I would guess you think of some names of saints that you have prayed to for certain things. But this is not the case for all folks.

When we think about the word saint, there are two meanings that usually come to mind. The first and older meaning of the word applies "Saint" to every Christian. This is how the New Testament uses the word saint. The second meaning applies to Christians that have died as faithful followers and were known as people that witnessed to the community. These are the folks that churches are named for, and that people looked to for help with a certain issue.

In my study this week, I found another definition of the word saint that really resonated with me. It was by Emmanuel Suhard, who was Cardinal Archbishop of Paris in the mid twentieth century. Here is what he said, "To be a witness does not consist in engaging in propaganda, nor even in stirring people up, but in being a living mystery. It means to live in such a way that one's life would not make sense if God did not exist." This statement nicely defines the word saint and gives way to thinking about our life's meaning with Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

Our story of Jesus bringing Lazarus back to life in John's gospel is a wonderfully radical example of this way of thinking about a saint. So, let's look at it for just a few

minutes through this lens. Lazarus had died. He was in the tomb for four days and his body was already decaying. Jesus, now in the scene orders the tomb to be opened despite objections that it is too late, by Martha. Knowing what he was about to do, Jesus reassures her that the glory of God will be seen. Jesus looks to his father in heaven and calls to Lazarus to come out of the tomb. Lazarus does so. He is alive even as he is wrapped in his burial cloths.

What an unforgettable experience that must have been. The witnesses will never forget seeing Lazarus brought back to life by Jesus of Nazareth. Lazarus was a saint. His life would have had no meaning if God did not exist. And he is now a walking, talking and very much a live mystery. I am sure that Lazarus had the realization that life is precious. He was brought back to life by a gracious God, but for most folks such a resurrection will not happen quite like it did for Lazarus.

The reality of death and its inevitability is with all of us throughout our lives. Dostoyevsky once wrote, "The certainty of inescapable death, and the uncertainty of what is to follow, are the most dreadful anguish in the world." And in our Gospel story today, Mary, Martha and Jesus are not exempt from the effect of death. No one likes death. No one wants it. And yet it comes. This most dreadful anguish in the world will come to each one of us. Mary and Martha were quite upset that their brother Lazarus had died. Jesus sees their tears and grief and He weeps with them. Jesus weeps not because of sadness that Lazarus died. For he already knew what he was going to do. But Jesus weeps with Mary and Martha because he feels their pain, their sense of loss Lazarus's death brought. Jesus had compassion on these two women who were hurting.

I think that Jesus also shed tears because of the great sadness that death brings with it. Jesus knows the effect of death upon the living and so he grieves with them.

Jesus weeps because he knows that raising Lazarus from the dead will only bring him closer to his own death. The Pharisees did not need much more ammunition to

order Jesus to be put to death, but certainly bringing someone back to life, would be a cause for concern about Jesus' ultimate power.

Jesus weeps because he understands what grief and pain his own death will bring to the lives of those who love him, to those that were close to him, and to those who followed Him.

Jesus weeps for all those who weep at the funerals of family and friends. Death is still a fearful thing today. No one I know looks forward to it, at least not too soon. Death may be cruel. It may be the enemy and it causes grief and fear and anxiety in our lives. One of the interesting things Max Lucado said last week in our DVD study was that our death will not come one minute sooner than God had it planned. So, folks, if he is not finished with you yet, you remain able to sit up and take nourishment. The Lord's plan will be fulfilled before you are called to your eternal rest.

And in our reading today, we have the good news that death has been defeated. Our God took away Lazarus's death and made him alive again. God has power over the holds of death. In the cross of Jesus, God dealt with death by taking on all the sin in the world as well as the death we deserve due to it.

Jesus died. But he came alive again. His resurrection was a great announcement to the whole world that death has been swallowed up in victory. There is nothing to be afraid of. There is nothing to be anxious about. But rather, on the other side of death we have the glorious hope of eternal life in heaven. This life will be perfect with no more pain and anguish. Eternal life will be the ultimate, a life to look forward to and not to fear.

Death is just the end of this life and the beginning of the new. The new life that God promised us at our baptisms. The words give us strength that we have been baptized into the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus. And folks that is good news. Through the victory of Christ's cross, we are assured of life forever.

And so today as we remember those loved ones who have gone before us in the past year, we celebrate their risen life with Jesus. We know that they are no longer in

pain but rather are basking in the light of God in a better place. Although we miss their earthly presence with us, we cling to this knowledge of ever lasting life.

Our Savior is ready to comfort us, make us calm and sympathize with us just as he did for the sisters at Bethany. And when our time comes to join these saints in heaven, we have his promise that we will not have to walk alone. Jesus will be present to lead us as he assures us, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will still live, even if he dies. Whoever lives and believes in me will never die." The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. **AMEN**