Yr. C, All Saints Sunday
November 6, 2022
Preached by the Rev. Furman Buchanan
Christ Episcopal Church
1132 Words

Lessons: **Sirach 35:12-17**
Psalm 84:1-6
2nd Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18
Luke 18:9-14

At every Requiem Eucharist—every funeral at which we celebrate the Holy Eucharist—there's a moment near the beginning of our Prayer of Great Thanksgiving, when I get to recall how Jesus Christ our Lord rose victorious from the dead; and, *therefore,* comforts us with the blessed hope of everlasting life.

And then, I get to speak this beautiful truth: "For to your faithful people, O Lord, life is *changed*, not ended; and when our mortal body lies in death, there is prepared for us a dwelling place eternal in the heavens."

These are the beautiful words *right before* we join our voices with Angels and Archangels and with *all the company of heaven*, who forever proclaim the glory of (God's) Name: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might.

Welcome to All Saints Sunday! The day when we sharpen our awareness that there is *only* one Church, and it is manifest in *two places*—heaven and earth. As we just sang, "Let saints on earth in concert sing with those whose work is done; for all the servants of *our King* in heaven and earth are *one*." Life gets changed, not ended.

In the first year of the last king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream. It was really more of a nightmare, featuring four terrifying sea monsters. This morning's lectionary trimmed out the spookiest verses, 4 through 14. If you like monster stories, you can read that part at home later today.

We hear enough of Daniel's nightmare to get the point—*he was terrified*. Indeed, the Jewish people of the ancient world *were terrified* of foreign kings, and their large, violent armies. The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah were attacked, abused, and oppressed often enough for these fears to be perfectly rational.

The *good news* from Daniel's dream comes at the end, in the form of assurance…an abiding assurance that *God's* Kingdom is larger, stronger, safer, and better than any kingdom on earth. Plus, God's Kingdom is forever—forever *and* ever. Alleluia!

The *best news* from Daniel's dream is that "the holy ones of the Most High God shall receive this kingdom…*as a gift*. It's important to take note of the Hebrew vocabulary found in this Old Testament promise. The 'holy ones' are not identified as *Hasid*—as virtuous or pious saints. The 'holy ones' in this passage are simply identified as *qadosh*—set apart…by *God's* choosing…by *God's* graciousness…by *God's* tender mercy.

What do you know?—Being a saint does not necessarily mean being *saintly*! You see, God chooses to set apart the pious *and* the impious. God chooses to show mercy to the saintly *and* to the sinners who say, "Yes, please… and thank you."

It's just as Jesus preached to a little congregation in Luke's Gospel (12:32) when he said, "Do not be afraid, little flock. It is our (heavenly) Father's good pleasure to GIVE YOU the Kingdom." Not 'sell you' the Kingdom. Not 'rent you' the Kingdom. Not 'loan you' the Kingdom 'at a good interest rate.'

No. It is the GOOD PLEASURE of our Father who art in heaven to GIVE US the Kingdom…forever and ever." Life gets changed, not ended.

This is why All Saints Sunday is a perfect day to celebrate Holy Baptism. We get to celebrate the Good News that God has chosen to *give us* the Kingdom….unconditionally, rent-free, without price. It's a gift, for goodness' sake! Just say "Yes, please." And then live your 'thank you' *out loud* for the glory of God…with all the saints in heaven and on earth.

This morning we have the great privilege to welcome a *brand new* saint-of-God, Libby Louise Moore! By water and the Holy Spirit—Libby is being knit into this one, great communion and fellowship—in the mystical Body of Christ—with saints above and saints here below, the *one* holy, catholic and apostolic Church in heaven and on earth.

In his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul describes this gift *so appropriately*…as an inheritance that we have received. We did not *earn it*. We don't have to rent it. We're not just *borrowing it*. It's a gift, for goodness' sake!

"I pray," St. Paul writes, "that in time you may (fully) know the extent of the hope to which God has called you. That you will *grasp* the riches of this glorious inheritance (we have received), and the *immeasurable greatness* of Christ's (loving) power in *our* lives."

In other words, St. Paul is encouraging us to just…say…"Yes" to this inheritance, and then to *live* our 'thank you' out loud for the glory of God…with all the saints in heaven and on earth.

It is impossible to wrap our minds around the breadth of all the saints, from every tribe and language and people and nation, across two thousand years…all the holy ones for whom life has changed, not ended.

So, let's just take a moment and think about our little corner of the world, *right here* in Christ Church parish. Three hundred fifteen years of saints—women and men, black and white, rich and poor, Whigs and Tories, Democrats and Republicans, and others still for whom some of these categories don't exactly fit.

Through wars and pandemics through fires and floods, from generation to generation, countless sinners who said, "Yes" to Christ and became saints of God…holy ones for whom it was God's good pleasure to *give* the Kingdom…this glorious inheritance of faith and hope and love. In so many different ways that we probably cannot even grasp, they lived their 'thank you' out loud for the glory of God, and now…they are at rest. *Their lives* are changed, not ended.

And we….those of us gathered *here…today*, through the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Eucharist, we are knit together—not only with *one another, but also* with *all of them.* And not just with *them,* but with all…*all the saints* from everywhere and from every age in one communion and fellowship.

God knows we are so prone to dividing ourselves up in every imaginable way, but Christ keeps on inviting us to live as one Body and (with) one Spirit. Christ keeps insisting that there *is* one (united) hope in God's call to *us*. There is, in fact, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism; (because) there is One God and Father *of all*.

It's enough! It's enough to make us want to live our 'thank you' out loud. It's enough to make us want to join our voices with Angels…and Archangels…and with all the company of heaven to sing our praise of God's glorious Name.

"From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,
through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
(we sing)…to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
(together) Alleluia! Alleluia!" *The Hymnal 1982, #287, v. 8*

Amen.