

“Even the Dead Heed His Voice”

John 11:32-44

5 November 2006 – All Saints' Sunday

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John 11:32-44

When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to him, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, ‘See how he loved him!’ But some of them said, ‘Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?’

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, ‘Take away the stone.’ Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, ‘Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?’ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, ‘Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.’ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, and let him go.’

Prayer.

All Saints' Day is always November 1st, with All Saints' Sunday immediately following. All Saints' is the church's great day of remembrance. On All Saints' we remember the saints, all of them, those whose names we can remember, and those whose names are known only to God. We remember their noble deeds, their witness, their martyrdom. All Saints' is the great memorial day of the church. [Willimon, W., Pulpit Resources, November 5, 2006, p.25-26]

It was a Saint who taught me how to operate a pumper and a tanker; who taught me how to fly fish and that every catch was a blessed gift from God. It was a Saint to taught me that it doesn't take big feet to make a firm foundation (or to support an outhouse!).

It was two baby Saints, unrelated, born a week apart to two different families that taught me how fragile life can be. It was a whole host of unnamed Saints,

forgotten veterans connected to the VA in Canandaigua, who taught me that it is important to attend funerals, so it is more than just the undertaker and the preacher in attendance to mourn a death.

It was a Saint who has now gone on before us, who taught me about the engineering principles behind seals and gaskets, the importance of giving back to the community by serving on the school board, and about the joy of giving lavishly to the church. A Saint introduced me to becoming a medic on the ambulance, and I was the first medic to his side the day his spirit left this world.

It was a Saint who was a member of the United Methodist Women's group who was an expert working Chicken BBQ; another who I enjoyed tea with, sipping from china cups and saucers in her back yard. Another Saint taught me that there was so much more I needed to learn about her condition. Yet another Saint, whose life, death, and resurrection we just celebrated this past week, is not far from my mind – how he built – buildings, organizations, and his family.

The funeral liturgy reads: “We bless thy name for all those who have died in the Lord, and who now rest from their labors, having received the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls.”

Today's proclamation also explores, on this day of remembrance, the necessity of forgetfulness. In many respects, forgetfulness can be a gift just as important as a memory.

It is said that time heals old wounds, and I've discovered this to be true in my life. With the passage of time, the more painful things we'd like to forget become gradually lost in the haze of gentle aging. This is a good thing; especially when it allows us to retain only the best memories, the best examples of Saints who have gone on before us.

In my own life, I am working to forget the harsh words, the angry faces, the names of those who have brought me pain. I try not to dwell on my own sins of omission or commission, let alone the sins of others who have now shed their sins and have gone on to receive their rewards. I pray that when I die, my memory will become just as gentle in the minds of others.

In his later years, the author Norman McClean reflects upon his brother's murder, which was the culmination of a life of alcohol and gambling, when he wrote “It is those we live with and love and should know who elude us. Now nearly all those I loved and did not understand when I was young are dead, but I still reach out to them.” [McClean, N., *A River Runs Through It*, University of Chicago Press, 1976]

I don't think we ever stop reaching out to them. In goodness and in pain, with crystal clarity and with the haze of time, we look to the Saints who have gone on before us.

In all of today's texts, in one way or another, are scripture passages that remember faith's witness from the past. Scripture tends to be by its very nature, historical retrieval. Remembrance. [Willimon, W., Pulpit Resources, November 5, 2006, p.25-26]

Let today's worship be an extended reflection upon remembrance, upon the subtle, complex nature of Christian remembering and Christian forgetting. Let the feast at our Lord's table, celebrated "in remembrance of me," be a celebration of the Saints God has sent our way. [Willimon, W., Pulpit Resources, November 5, 2006, p.25-26].

And let each of us light one candle; one candle for all the Saints we've come to know and love in life, one candle for all the memories that we've been given, and, thankfully, for those memories that have been forgotten.

Light one candle. Remember. Give thanks; for what was, what is, and what is yet to be. Amen.