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Christ Episcopal Church - Towanda, Pa
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All Saints Day- A Grief Observed

[1] In John's Gospel today, the weeping of Jesus is not a sentimental moment but weeping for Lazarus, he weeps for himself because he knows what's going to come and weeps for reality of death in general because he knows that death separates us and traumatizes us, beyond fathomable. beyond anything we can get through. Jesus weeps for what death does in our lives and what it brings to our lives. To contextualize this, maybe he weeps even more with the death we've had to deal with in the last year. This narrative shows its characters sitting in the trauma of death... Mary, Martha, and even Jesus himself. ¹

[2] We are there too in our immediate circles of community, family and the wide scale numbers of death since last year which are astounding, worldwide now at over 5 million and over 750,000 in the U.S. **Grief is a foreign territory with rules all its own**
One discovers it as unwelcome territory of being bone tired but unable to calm the mind and heart to receive rest. Here it feels that when death enters our lives, our home, how do we feel peace., and rest in that?

[3] One of the promises that Jesus makes is that we will be given rest. We know that God is vulnerable and God grieves too. God also in the midst of grief and reality has power over even death. Walking that terrain with God is hope filled because of what God can do and does do in the midst of grief.² How does our particular tradition inform us accordingly?

The tradition of observing All Saint's Day on November 1st has its origins in the early Church when Christians regularly commemorated the martyrdom of men and women on the anniversary of their death.

Once persecutions ceased in the early 300s, after Emperor Constantine made the Christian faith the official religion of the Roman Empire, "local

¹ Working Preacher Sermon Brainwave Podcast 810- All Saints Day, Nov. 7th, 2021

² *Ibid*

dioceses instituted a common feast day [during Easter season] in order to ensure that all martyrs, known and unknown, were properly honored...The current date of November 1 was instituted by Pope Gregory III (731-741), when he consecrated a chapel to all the martyrs in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and ordered an annual celebration.³ In the course of the centuries following, the Solemnity of All Saints came to include not only martyrs but all the faithful departed.

In the New Testament, the word "saints" is used to describe the entire membership of the Christian community, and in the Collect for All Saints' Day, the word "elect" is used in a similar sense. From very early times, however, the word "saint" came to be applied primarily to persons of heroic sanctity, whose deeds were recalled with gratitude by later generations.⁴

Scholar Derek Olsen is a liturgical enthusiast who explores spirituality through the Book of Common Prayer. He posits that our own beloved book maps out a deeper relationship with God. I find his articulation of our Rite 1 Eucharist reflects the language of Anglicanism..." And we bless thy holy Name for all thy servants departed this life in thy faith and fear, beseeching thee to grant them continual growth in thy love and service; and to grant us grace so to follow the good examples of all thy saints that with them we may be partakers in thy heavenly kingdom (*The Book of Common Prayer* p. 330). This language affirms that the saints of God are partakers in the heavenly kingdom and also envisions a process of growth that is not ended by physical death. The pattern laid out here then reflects a classic threefold division into :

the Church Militant —we the living;

the Church Triumphant—those departed who currently enjoy the fullness of God's presence; and

the Church Expectant—those departed who do not yet experience the full presence of God but who will, as that process of growth is played out and as God's promises in Baptism and Eucharist are fully delivered in the final consummation of all things.⁵

Keeping these categories in mind, the feast of All Saints celebrates the mighty deeds of God in and through the Church Triumphant. The feast of

³ http://catholicism.about.com/od/holydaysand_holidays/p/All_Saints_Day.htm

⁴ *Holy Women, Holy Men Celebrating the Saints*. Church Publishing Inc. 2010. P664

⁵ Derek Olsen *Inwardly Digest - The Prayer Book as a Guide to a Spiritual Life*. Forward Movement 2016 pg. 78-79

All Souls recalls to us the Church Expectant who shall yet enjoy that final consummation. ⁶

Our readings today weave a beautiful tapestry of the Good News...
Isaiah: The promise...God will swallow up death - its deity that travels the earth. The image of destruction will be the victim of God's design.

⁷ There will be a feast of rich food and wine whilst God wipes away the tears from all faces.

This is echoed in Revelation that God will wipe every tear and Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more as the first things have passed away in the making of all things new.

The weeping and grief of Mary, Martha and even Jesus at Lazarus's death do not have the final say. Our faith teaches us that we are people of the resurrected Jesus who came for us and gives up hope of a life beyond death. This is the new life in Christ which only has its beginnings in our mortal lives. Life is not ended but changed.

We believe this and claim this in our Eucharistic feast. As people of the incarnation we take in the body and blood of Christ to be transformed into God's people. We lean into the sorrow alongside the joy with God's eternal promise. In this we can celebrate today with the saints past, present and future to include us.

The Holy Spirit is with us in life and death and even beyond death. God is with our loved ones as they die and move beyond this earthly life. God is with us in our grief which is always with us. He is there in love which is shown through community. His love is ever present and not dependent on our thoughts, consent, understanding, religious affiliation or creed.

Unbind us, Lord Christ, set us free from all that keeps us from loving and being loved. Give us grace to participate in your agape love, which like you is everywhere present and dwells in all things. I ask this in the name of the Risen and ever present Christ. Amen.

⁶ *Ibid.* pg. 79

⁷ Working Preacher - *Ibid.*