

Sermon

All Saints Sunday

November 4, 2018

“Unbind him and let him go.”

All Saints’ Sunday is always one of those days where you know you will have a conversation about it in the coming days. Whether it’s at lunch or at school, there will be someone coming who will say, “How was Church?” Let’s sort it out together before it happens so we’ll all be ready.

“Church was good. It was All Saints’ Sunday.”

“All Saints’ Sunday, you pray for the Saints. I thought only Roman Catholics did that.”

“We also pray for the Saints.”

“Do you pray for Paul and Mary and Peter?”

“Yes, but we also pray for all of them. We pray for you and me and all the communion of saints.”

“The communion of saints?” (Deep breath)

“Yes, the whole family of God, those whom we love, those we hurt, bound together in Christ by sacrament, prayer, and praise.”

“So you and I You I are Saints?”

“Yes. Saints are those we know and those we do not. The living and the dead.”

“Wait. You pray for the dead?”

“Yes. Every Sunday.”

“Why?”

“Well we pray for them, because we still hold them in our love, because we trust that in God’s presence those who have chosen to serve God will grow in God’s love as we do.”

At some point, the conversation will get to the place of

“I thought saints were those who have been declared holy.”

“Declaring what is holy is God’s work, not ours.”

“Don’t Saint’s have to perform miracles to be a Saint?”

And our response I hope, will be, “We do, every day... carry out God’s miracles.”

Performing miracles. The work of the Saints; those miracles we do as the family of God. Can we name them when it happens? Can the Saints’ see their part in the work that God is doing?

And this brings us to the Gospel. Here is an aura of death: mourning and weeping, a tomb in a cave with a stone laid across the entrance, and there are grave cloths.

Lazarus is bound from head to foot in burial wrappings and has been dead for days.

Then Jesus commands Lazarus out and as Lazarus emerges, Jesus commands that the burial wrappings, the last vestiges of death, be removed. Even in death, the miracle is that through Christ, God, has the final word: “Unbind him and let him go.”

The Feast of All Saints’ is about what all God’s saints have known and experienced, that here and now there is no death or grief or fear so deep and dark that the voice of Jesus cannot reach into it, call us out, and bring life.

It’s a story where the miracle seems clear, Jesus comes. Jesus comes and calls Lazarus out of the tomb and back to life. God brings resurrection. But Jesus does the work right? The saints are watching it happen.

“Unbind him and let him go.” This is the command Jesus gives those present and to us. This is our work; Where we come in and do our part. Jesus performs what is perhaps his most significant miracle -- so much so that not only are many in the crowd moved to faith but his opponents are moved to conspire toward his death – but the work is not over.

There is a part of resurrection that is for us. Jesus instructs and expects the people to participate. The ones present complete the miracle by removing those burial wrappings, so that Lazarus can live. It is Jesus who has the power to heal, to feed, to restore, to bring to life, to redeem. At the same time, Christ involves us and, indeed, perhaps expects us to complete them.

I wonder what other miraculous things God intends to do in our communities in us, with us, and through us. I wonder where in those places of certain death, where the Spirit calls to life and invites us to liberate them.

Sometimes these things are huge; burial wrappings of our social structures that enable dead relationships. Part of our call is to unravel those things to enable new life to happen; directing our efforts to end hunger, providing shelter for homeless children and adults, prison ministries, adequate and accessible education for all, or help people get to work.

Or maybe these things are smaller—providing a listening ear to a colleague or friend who is struggling and feels alone. Visiting a long-lost saint who is removed from the community of St. Paul's. We are invited to consider the many ways we keep from loving and caring for one another; to set one another free to come alive.

Maybe too, it might be in those last moments, when those we love are waiting for us to let them be with God. Those who need us to unbind them and let them go.

God wants, I believe, to continue to do miraculous things and continues to want to do them in, with, and through us.

This is the work of the Saints; the promise we make when we become disciples. We are invited to see the life Jesus represents. Our life, as is the story of Lazarus, is not about sickness or death, but about resurrection and life and the glory of God.

Today we will witness a new daughter in God's family, the communion of saints. Elizabeth Francis, "Libby," will learn to remove those burial garments wherever they may be. Beginning this day, she will take part in a life of resurrection. Today we "unbind her and let her go," live a life of faithfulness and love. She will follow the Saints before her in all "virtuous and godly living" is our prayer today. We will, with God's help, help her unravel everything life's journey brings.

And to guide her on the way, we will use all the resources of the saints now and every age. And today words of encouragement are given to her and to us, from a sermon that is nine hundred years old. Words spoken by Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux. (1153)

“We long to share in the citizenship of heaven, to dwell with the spirits of the blessed, of apostles, the great host of martyrs, the noble company of confessors... In short, we long to be united in happiness with all the saints... Come, we spur ourselves on, to rise again with Christ, to seek the world which is above and set our mind on the things of heaven to long for those who are longing for us, hasten to those who are waiting for us, and ask those who look for our coming to intercede for us. When we commemorate the saints we are inflamed with another yearning: that Christ our life may also appear to us as Christ appeared to them and that we may one day share in his glory.”

In the coming days, those conversations about Saints will come. When they do, we will tell about the saints of God. We will proclaim how God sprinkles us all around Meridian, to the places where garments are desperately waiting for us to unwind them as God calls life out of death. We are to give witness to our faith in the God who raises the dead. We share in a taste of the heavenly banquet here and now. We eat and drink at God’s table with Christ and the saints.

We are called to join in God's ongoing and miraculous work... to heal, to comfort, and restore this world. Because of Christ’s resurrection, we can live unbound, now and eternally; able to love without limits. God is still doing amazing things and God

wants us to be part of those things, even calling us to complete them. We too perform miracles. We are Saints who perform miracles. We unbind the world and let them go.