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St. Margaret's Church
All Saints' Sunday, RCL Year A
November 2, 2008

All Saints' Sunday is just about my favorite day of the year. I love the feeling of connecting with the community of the faithful that has gone before us - the great cloud of witnesses who have paved the way. We remember those who have loved us and taught us be to who we are. We give thanks for the lives of those we knew, but we also remember the lives of those who made the church what it is today.

All Saints' Sunday is the antidote to All Hallows' Eve or Halloween. All Hallows' Eve deals with a very real fear - the fear of death. We dress up as ghosts or goblins hoping to spook one another. But, deep at the heart of this Christian holiday we stare death in the face. In this holiday, we acknowledge the presence of evil and of that deep-seated fear of the unknown. None of us will go to our death knowing exactly what to expect. Yet, All Hallows' Eve does not stand alone.

If it did stand alone, I think it might be hard to fully indulge in its magic and spookiness. After all, if we are celebrating death and darkness and evil can we really do so playfully? Or deep in our hearts are we acknowledging that the reality of All Hallows' Eve is so scary that we would rather laugh than have to take it seriously?

All Saints' Sunday is not a day to focus on death and dying, but rather it is a day to focus on the hope of life eternal. All Saints' is about trust and hope. All Saints' is that day where Christians can claim both holy days side by side. Because it's easier to trivialize death, we even try to pass Halloween off as a kids' holiday. But, if we were truthful, we might just say that our culture doesn't like to deal with the darkness of death at all.

But death does have a place in our lives. We can't deny it. There's no reason to. Our faith reminds us that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. NOTHING, not one thing...can separate us, not height or depth, nor things seen nor things unseen, nor life or death.
Nothing separates us from the Love of God.

So, we as Christians have this unique opportunity.

We have the chance not to be ashamed by our Christian hope.

We have the chance to proclaim the resurrected life.

We have the chance to appear like idiots before the rest of the world.

We have the chance to be fools for Christ.

A few years ago a woman came into my office and wanted to know what afterlife was like for her recently deceased mother. I had no idea what to say. So I sought out some help. I wrote the question on my seminary class email group. I got a whirlwind of

responses from a bunch of priests. The heart of these responses was that we don't know exactly what the next life will be like. Death is truly a mystery.

But my my colleague, Eleanor, said it most beautifully,
“Maybe I am supposed to say I know what happens to me when I die, but I can't. I don't know if I become part of some ethereal nature of God, if I get absorbed beyond my own individuality into God's being, or if I stay substantially the person I am now, only made whole and perfect. If I am made whole and perfect, will that be the whole and perfect me of 2 years old, 22, 32, 42, 52, or 92? Will my sister who has lost parts of her body to cancer have those parts back, and will that be a horror or a blessing? What seems whole and perfect to me, or what seems broken and damaged to me, may not be so to God. I am not ashamed to say I don't know what happens to me beyond death, but that I trust that whatever it is, it is for God's glory and my benefit. The resurrected body of Jesus, in the tradition of the gospels and of the church, was *unrecognizable* to his closest friends. The church, as the resurrected body of Christ in the world today surely bears the mud, blood and tears of Jesus' crucifixion, as well as the shining brightness of his empty tomb, but I sometimes wonder how recognizable we are to Jesus.”

On All Saints' Day, we have the chance to be recognizable to Jesus.
On All Saints' Day, we have the chance to yell at the world and say look here.
Look at Francis, look at Mary, look at Absalom, look at Simon, look at Simeon, look at Cranmer, look at King, look at Nightingale.
Most of all, look at us.

Look at this community of saints right here.
While I imagine there are some days, when we feel more like saints than other days, we are all saints of the Christian life.
We are the body of Christ.
Us, the baptized.
Us, the body on earth.
Us, the wounded hands and feet of the Christ.

We are the saints.
We are the ones who are called to lose our shame and embarrassment around this Christian hope.
We don't have to posture.
We don't have to pretend.
We don't have to know the answers.
But, we do have to profess that we can stare death in the face and say, “I'll see you some day.”
Maybe we will be able to stare a dying friend in their face and say,
“I'll see you again some day, too.”

A sign on the Winchester cathedral in England says, as you enter the church, “You are entering a conversation that began long before you were born and will continue long after you’re dead.”

This morning we will baptize the 40th child of God at St. Margaret’s this year. As far as I can tell that is a record for us. One of my friends said there must be something in the water over at St. Margaret’s. I’ve never heard of such a productive church!

Why do we do baptisms on All Saints’s? Well, it is a family reunion of sorts. We welcome these new members into the household of God. These are the newest saints of the church. And we introduce them to the stories of the old saints. And the conversation we have this morning is knit onto the conversation that has been going on for thousands of years. We knit our story into the story of the Caltriders and the Ridouts and the Wilsons and the Halls and the Duncans.

This morning we add the stories of Wilson, Michael, Stephen, and Madelyn.

Vow with me to pray for them. And promise with me that we will tell them the stories of the saints. Promise that you will help them become recognizable to Jesus as we all strive to live out our Baptismal Covenant. There are many saints who have gone before us who now rest from their labors. But they told us the stories and they showed us the way to the well of life. Those baptismal waters are waters of healing and refreshment, but they are also waters of baptism.

Because baptism is not something you can take back. One you’re baptized you can’t undo it. Rather, the rest of your life is spent determining what you will do about it.

Will you live in a sense of fear of what death is really like? Or will you live in sense of peace and joy knowing that you are a part of the conversation that will continue for ages to come? That conversation will help lead us back to that place where we will “hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike us, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be our shepherd, and he will guide us to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from our eyes.”

This morning we will baptize the 40th child of God here at St. Margaret’s. Turns out there is something special about the water here.