

**Sermon, Father William J. Albinger**

**All Saints Sunday November 1, 2009**

Proper 26B 2009

In the name of our one living God who creates abundantly, loves extravagantly and sustains eternally: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is All Saints Sunday when we celebrate all the saints whether they made it on a church calendar or not. Many of us today will pause and reflect on those whom we love but see no longer. That elegant phrase from the Prayer Book states a great Christian truth – the love of God as shown in the person of Jesus Christ triumphs over death. We have a God of the living not a God of death. We have a God who loved all things into being and who holds onto all whatever may be going on in the world and in our lives.

Our lessons today instruct us in that. In our reading from the Wisdom of Solomon, a book from the apocrypha written just before the time of Jesus by Jew in Alexandria just after its conquest by Rome. The author is part of a community that is now being marginalized and oppressed by the new conquerors and by the Egyptian majority that surrounds them. Even in such difficult times, the author assures the righteous of their eternal life in the love of God. God's eternal care is assured for the faithful.

Our lesson from the Book of Revelation was also written in a time of great persecution of the small Christian communities by the Roman Emperor. The author sees beyond the current trials to another time when all creation will be made new. Using words from the Prophet Isaiah, the author assures his people of God's faithfulness and of a time when they will live with God and death, mourning, crying and pain

Jesus models this faithfulness in our Gospel lesson about the raising of Lazarus. In this story, John sums up all he has to say about Jesus and about discipleship. When Jesus learns that Lazarus is gravely ill and that he is being summoned by Mary and Martha, Jesus deliberately waits until there can be no question that Lazarus is indeed dead. Only then does he start his journey to the home of his best friends. In doing so, Jesus crosses three thresholds.

He first crosses the threshold of fear and doubt by crossing from safe Galilee to hostile Judea where the authorities were plotting against him. Next he crosses the threshold of danger by crossing into Bethany. Bethany is just outside of Jerusalem. The Temple and Herod's palace and all they stood for were literally just over the hill still known as the Mount of Olives. Jesus has already foretold three times what the High Priest and scribes will do to him in Jerusalem. Finally, Jesus approaches the threshold of death. He prays to the Father after promising the crowd that they would see the glory of God. Faithful to the Father even at the door of death he calls out to dead man, "Lazarus come out!" When Lazarus emerges from the tomb still wearing his burial cloths, Jesus orders the crowd, "Unbind him!"

I think the full meaning of the story of the raising of Lazarus can only be understood if we read the rest of Chapter 11 of John's Gospel. When the powers in Jerusalem heard of this great sign done by Jesus they called a meeting of the ruling council. If we let him go on like this, they reasoned, all will come to believe in Jesus and then the Romans will come and destroy both our Temple and the nation. Caiaphas the high priest then uttered these words; "It is better to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed." Jesus thus became their sacrificial lamb, the scapegoat to be killed to keep them in power.

Jesus' life and teachings, his miracles and healings were all intended to unbind us from death's

hold in our own lives. Jesus models a faithful way of facing death with ultimate confidence in God's power of life – even over death.

Our saints model this in their own lives and times. Some were martyrs who faced death, crossing over its threshold in confidence of God's eternal life giving power that overcomes death. Others live lives that teach us of God's preference for life. Some, like Damien and Mother Theresa, live lives caring for the least valued – those scorned and even thrown away by society. Others, like Martin Luther King, Jr., testify to their belief in God's preference for life by standing firm for justice and mercy even in the face of a culture of fear, hatred, death and violence.

We don't have to be perfect to be saints of God. We don't have to wear halos. Both Damien and Mother Theresa had wicked bad tempers and Martin Luther King, Jr. had a fondness for the ladies. No, we don't have to be perfect; we just have to answer God's call and live lives that point to God's life giving power. Most of us do this in our daily lives and are noticed only by those whom our lives touch.

Martin Bruggemann, a great Old Testament scholar, recently lectured in Sandye Wilson's church in NJ. He spoke of saints as being another word for disciples. They are a people who create a "culture of call" - People who unbind us from what holds us back and call us to live into the fullness of life. He focused on Elisha, beginning with his call by Elijah. To be a disciple, a saint of God, someone has to find us. When Elijah found Elisha, he didn't say anything to him. He cast his cape over him. He cast his mantle over him and that forever defined him and changed his life.

So today, I ask you to join me in thinking of who has cast their mantle over us and changed our identity and sense of purpose and being? Who unbound us from our fears and confusion and

showed us the way to a fuller and more abundant life? Sometimes it is the mantel of kindness and compassion, other times it may be the mantel of loving correction, sometimes it is the mantel of example. So I ask you, who cast their mantel over you? What were their lessons and their expectations of you and how are you doing? This discipleship business is an intergenerational thing. After a certain age, we are expected to throw our mantels over others. Who have you thrown your mantel over and what were your lessons and expectations?

We all have our saints. The God of life sends them, and us, to nurture and transform the world. When Jesus taught us to pray “thy kingdom come on earth as it is in Heave” he wasn’t saying words. He was telling us to be part of the story. To be, like the saints in our lives, part of a culture of call, part of God’s call to a world of justice and mercy. It is a process and it moves us outside our comfort zones and it puts us at odds with many, but called we are.

So again, let us remember who called us and what was the mantel thrown over us. Let also think of who will be sitting in church some All Saints Day in the future remembering us. When we go to the table, remember that it is not just us there, but all the company of Heaven surround us.

AMEN.