

All Saints' Celebration
November 4, 2018
The Rev'd Emily Richards

The Beautiful Interconnectedness of Life

I love All Saints Day. It has always been one of my favorite celebrations in the church calendar. All Saints is a feast day that has been left to the church to observe. Hallmark has yet to come up with a sellable greeting card that says, *Wishing You a Happy All Saints Day* and Madison Avenue has not produced chocolates with Mother Teresa's face on it, but I wouldn't put it past them. I love this day partly because of this time of year- there is a definite change in the landscape as the days grow shorter and colder. There's a different feel in the air, even the light appears differently. The ancient Celts believed that during this time the veil between worlds became especially permeable, referring to these days as a thin place when heaven and earth seemed closer than ever, when we could reconnect with those beloved souls who had gone before us.

In this one service we welcome the newest members, Alexzander, Levi and Carly into the household of the church through the holy waters of baptism while we also pray for that great cloud of witnesses, remembering in particular those whose own lives shaped ours. This is a time where the hope of the future and the remembrance of the past intersect and where we find our place living somewhere in between. One of my living saints, Nadia Bolz-Weber believes that "our lives are like a long piece of fabric with our baptism on one end and our funeral on another. And there are times when that fabric is pinched in the middle and the ends are held up so that the water and words from our baptisms plus the earth and words from our funerals have come from the past and future to meet us in the present. And in that meeting we are reminded of the promises of God: That we are God's, that there is no sin, no darkness, and yes, no grave that God will not come to find us in and love us back to life. That where two or more are gathered, Christ is with us. These promises outlast our earthly bodies and the limits of time."*

Today is one of those rare moments where our past and future meet and we are reminded that we all belong to God. From now until eternity. We are marked as Christ's own forever. And when we gather together as family, as God's household, Christ is with us. All the courageous, beautiful, flawed saints of God, those living and those who have died are bound up in this holy economy of love. When I pour the water over Alexzander's head I will think of his great-grandmother Mary and all the baptisms

she carefully prepared for as a member of our altar guild. And when I pour the water over Carly's head I will think of the three generations before, her mother and grandfather, and aunts and uncles, and great grandparents who were baptized in this very place. And when I pour the water over Levi's head I will remember those precious moments when I prayed the very same prayers for his older brother and sister. Christ's presence is made known in this place generation after generation.

"This Feast Day is about connection," writes another good Lutheran David Lose, "this whole earth is a "thin place" in which everlasting life and day-to-day existence are joined in God's holy adventure. Our prayers of gratitude or blessing for our beloved testify to the interconnectedness of life: not even death can separate us from the love of God or our loved ones." This idea of interconnectedness is something we need to cling to now more than ever. NPR and PBS conducted a poll this week and found that roughly 80 percent of Americans say they are concerned that the negative tone and lack of civility in Washington will lead to violence or acts of terror. Reporter David Green who has been talking to Americans throughout the country leading up to the election on Tuesday said, "I left these conversations thinking, "Here are people who are on different sides of things; but it is all about fear. Fear is a driving emotion behind these mid-terms. We share more at this moment than I think we realize because we are sharing similar emotions about the future and what it all means."

In this last week alone with the senseless massacre at the Tree of Life Synagogue, the killing of two African Americans in a grocery store because of the color of their skin, the pipe bombs sent in the mail and the 5,000 troops deployed to the border with Mexico because the caravan of migrants are drawing closer to us, fear looms large. Fear of the other. Fear that my way of life will be taken away because of you. Fear of what might happen if the other party has power. Sadly, David Green may be right. Fear may be one of the only things we hold in common right now in our nation. AND YET, in the midst of our fearfulness, division and disconnection we have been reminded it doesn't have to be this way. Matthew Shepard was finally laid to rest at the Washington National Cathedral twenty years after his death. His family had worried that his grave would have been desecrated so they had never found a final resting place. Until now. At the end of his homily for Matthew's Interment Service Bishop Gene Robinson tearfully said, "Gently rest in this place. You are safe now. And Matt, welcome home." Fear and hate did not triumph in the end. Love did. Days after the eleven beloved souls died as they were worshipping with their brothers and sisters in their sacred space, the Muslim community in Pittsburgh raised more than \$70,000 for the victims and their families. Wasi Mohamed, executive director of the Pittsburgh Islamic Center said: 'We just want to know what you need ... If it's people outside your next service protecting you, let us know. We'll be there. We'll be there so you can worship in peace and safety.'" Fear and

hate did not triumph in the end. Love did. Love always does. It does when we expand our hearts and open ourselves to the other in our midst recognizing their belovedness as members in the household of God.

The whole story of the raising of Lazarus is for us to realize that we can loosen these shackles of fear. We can break free from them altogether. In this act Jesus proclaims that resurrection is not just our future promise but our present reality. Resurrection here and now is what he promises to Martha and all of us. It means that life, and life abundantly for all, is what is at stake. It is easy to assume that abundant life only means life after death. It is easy to give in to the fearfulness, the divisiveness, and the sense of hopelessness. To Mary and Martha and all those who witness Lazarus coming out of tomb, including us, Jesus embodies the vision of Shalom, that dream of God's for all God's beloved saints we hear echoed in the words of the prophet Isaiah: *that the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines. And he will destroy the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth.*

As living, breathing saints of God walking on this earth today we share in the legacy of those who have gone before us, doing everything in our power to live the abundant life here and now and to share it with all God's beloved, especially those who have been deprived of this promise. Carly, Levi and Alexzander today join this great cloud of witnesses, a multitude here on earth and in heaven striving to walk in the light and love of the resurrection. Together with them may we reclaim the power of love, proclaiming with every fiber of our being the beautiful interconnectedness of life: That we all belong to God and to one another, and that there is no sin, no fearfulness, no darkness and no grave that God will not come to find us in and love us back to life. Nothing can separate us from the love of God or our loved ones or the beautifully diverse world and peoples which God has created. Amen.