

**Isaiah 25:6-9**

<sup>6</sup>On this mountain,  
the Lord of heavenly forces will prepare for all peoples  
a rich feast, a feast of choice wines,  
of select foods rich in flavor,  
of choice wines well refined.

<sup>7</sup>He will swallow up on this mountain the veil that is veiling all peoples,  
the shroud enshrouding all nations.

<sup>8</sup>He will swallow up death forever.

**The Lord God will wipe tears from every face;  
he will remove his people's disgrace from off the whole earth,  
for the Lord has spoken.**

<sup>9</sup>They will say on that day,  
"Look! This is our God,  
for whom we have waited—  
and he has saved us!

This is the Lord, for whom we have waited;  
let's be glad and rejoice in his salvation!"

**Revelation 21:1-6a**

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup>I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup>I heard a loud voice from the throne say, "Look! God's dwelling is here with humankind. He will dwell with them, and they will be his peoples. God himself will be with them as their God. <sup>4</sup>He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. There will be no mourning, crying, or pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." <sup>5</sup>Then the one seated on the throne said, "Look! I'm making all things new." He also said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." <sup>6</sup>Then he said to me, "All is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will freely give water from the life-giving spring.

### **John 11:32-44**

<sup>32</sup> When Mary arrived where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died."

<sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her crying and the Jews who had come with her crying also, he was deeply disturbed and troubled. <sup>34</sup> He asked, "Where have you laid him?"

They replied, "Lord, come and see."

<sup>35</sup> Jesus began to cry. <sup>36</sup> The Jews said, "See how much he loved him!" <sup>37</sup> But some of them said, "He healed the eyes of the man born blind. Couldn't he have kept Lazarus from dying?"

<sup>38</sup> Jesus was deeply disturbed again when he came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone covered the entrance. <sup>39</sup> Jesus said, "Remove the stone."

Martha, the sister of the dead man, said, "Lord, the smell will be awful! He's been dead four days."

<sup>40</sup> Jesus replied, "Didn't I tell you that if you believe, you will see God's glory?" <sup>41</sup> So they removed the stone. Jesus looked up and said, "Father, thank you for hearing me. <sup>42</sup> I know you always hear me. I say this for the benefit of the crowd standing here so that they will believe that you sent me." <sup>43</sup> Having said this, Jesus shouted with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" <sup>44</sup> The dead man came out, his feet bound and his hands tied, and his face covered with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Untie him and let him go."

## Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

We've been on a long stewardship journey together as a church – and don't worry, I'm not extending our stewardship series another week – but serendipitously, this emphasis on stewardship has led us to this week. Today, we gather to celebrate All Saints Sunday, a day that commemorates the lives of the faithful people who've passed on into death before us, a day to remember the good stewards who shared God's gracious gifts across the centuries. Quite literally, we live in light of their generosity, as they helped to shape a future with their Gospel-laden lives. We now inhabit that future, for our present is shaped by the lives of the saints passed and the constant work of the Holy Spirit.

Luther once wrote that we're all *simul justus et peccator*, or simultaneously sinners and saints. There's a lot this says to us about our identities, about the nature of humanity in light of God's grace, and about the lives we're called to live, but perhaps the most important thing for us to note today is this: we're saints right now. We don't magically become saints when we die. Nor does holy behavior make us saintlier than someone else. When we celebrate All Saints Sunday, we celebrate all of God's people across the past and into the future and in the present right now, for God makes all of us sinners into saints.

Of course, that's a nice thought in theory, but when we put it into practice, our divisions of reality get much messier. There's always that person, at least one, that we just can't see as a saint. You know the one that I'm talking about. The one who, no matter how nice they try to be or how eminently likeable they may seem, you just don't like. For high school

me, that person was "Jay." Jay was a nice enough guy. Friends with many of my friends. Nice smile. We liked the same kind of girl. He tended to treat people fairly well. He played drums in the marching band alongside me. Good hair. Sounds a lot like me! But goodness did he irritate me! The way he carried himself, the way he talked, the way he always seemed to try just a bit too hard in every situation. He clearly wanted to be liked, and clearly that wasn't happening for me.

At some point later in life, I realized the reason I didn't like "J" had nothing to do with "J" and it had everything to do with me. The problem was "J" and I were just a little too much alike. Not only did we like the same kind of girl, but we had the same terrible track record of serial dating, leaving a trail of broken hearts and unanswered questions in the wake of our pursuit of love. Not only did we share a passion for music and a friend group, but I saw him as competition for

my spot as drum line leader and as a competitor for the time and affection of my friends. Not only did he try to hard to be liked, but so did I. What I saw in “J” was my own sin, magnified in the mirror of his life. I never imagined God could make me a saint, so it was quite easy to write “J” off as a sinner.

Here’s the thing. In the eyes of God, “J” is just as much of a sinner-saint as I am. No more perfect, no more flawed, and no more beloved. That’s the trajectory of All Saints. If we’re all saints, then we can’t keep writing people off because they have a political stance we don’t like, or a darker hue of skin, or a different sexual orientation than our own. All Saints Sunday belongs to all the saints who’ve gone on before us and all those yet to come, no matter if we like them. All Saints is a promise to all those who, like me, have trouble loving ourselves that God loves us anyway, and a promise for all those that we struggle to love, that they are loved too.

But we can't just stop there, admitting God's grace belongs to all and leaving ourselves in prideful place of still writing off fellow saints. A new heaven and earth are coming and the old one filled with our prejudice and dislike is passing away. God is making a house here amongst humanity, so that we all will become people of God. Isaiah and Revelation each tell us that every ill will be wiped away from every eye, not just the eyes that we like. There will be no mourning, crying, or pain anymore, for the former things have passed away, including our prejudice.

If we continue to live in the world of division and tears, where we let our pettiness divide us, then work against God's kingdom. We remain in Lazarus' tomb while Jesus calls him out to live life in a new world, one where even death cannot hold us back from the goodness God prepares for us all. But Jesus calls to each of us, "Lazarus, come out!" Come out of the graves that prevent you from fellowship with God's

people. Come out of the tombs that trap you inside your own insecurities and prejudices. Come out of the coffins that confine you to the silence of sin instead of the shouts of freedom and joy.

But, as we know all too well ourselves, we cannot do this alone, not fully. So Jesus calls to our community, “Unbind them, and let them go.” We’re called to unbind one another from the grave clothes that mark us as sinners bound to the old life. Jesus calls us out of the grave and frees us from the destiny of death. Then he calls a community to surround us and help us transition, throwing off the remains of the old life that clings to us and walking in the light of the new day shed by the risen son who is the sunshine of the new heaven and new earth, Jesus Christ. We must learn not only to tolerate the “J”s in our lives, but to embrace those that we struggle to love as saints, as those forgiven and resurrected by the power of the Gospel.

That's the role of all the saints. Jesus calls to us and cries, "unbind them and let them go!" How have the saints in our pasts freed us from the temptations that tied us to the tomb? Today we'll lift up the names of saints who've died, who've gone on before us, who've untied us from the bonds of the grave and shown us the way into new life. To each of them, Jesus extends the same words he first beckoned to Lazarus: come out. They stand in the presence of God as witnesses that the new heaven and new earth are becoming more and more a reality. They remind us that life in Christ is worth living, no matter what the world says, because they've experienced the transformation of all things in the presence of Jesus. That's what we proclaim on all saints, that through the power of God we're all transformed, and our brokenness is made beautiful by the love of Jesus Christ.

That beauty that we find as saints appears as the image of God becomes more and more clear in our lives. As God's

beauty becomes prevalent, we who were created in the image of God become more ourselves as well, inhabiting the identity we were given in our creation. This isn't a point of pride for us, that somehow our beauty is more valuable or worthy than others, but rather all of it arises as evidence of God's gift to of sainthood to sinners. This doesn't mean that any of us are perfect people. All of us saints have failed to live up to that identity. The names that we read today aren't evidence of perfect Christians, but rather of broken people saved by God's perfect love.

We are all imperfect saints. In the church, there is room for our failures so long as we make room for the flaws of others as well. We can only rise from the grave with Lazarus if we admit that part of us is broken, that part of us is dead, that we need a new life out of the ashes of the old. When we give thanks for the saints, we lift up their willingness to admit their

need for God. For all the saints, who from their labors rest, we give thanks to God who gave them new life.

We, the saints of today, now stand with an opportunity to offer a legacy to our children like the one our ancestors left to us. One of a community that welcomes all people in the name of Jesus Christ. One of a church built not on our failed attempts at righteousness but on God's righteous grace. One where we admit our faults and embrace one another as we pursue God's transformation. One where we hear the call to unbind one another as a gift to act in grace, not allowing the lies of sin and death to hold us back from life in Christ, but instead replacing one another's grave clothes with outfits for mission in the world.

At Pub Theology this week, one of our regular attenders brought up the idea that heaven is not just for us to go when we die, but that heaven is something that we can live out now, that we can live heavenly lives here on earth. That's just

what Jesus was talking about when he spoke of the Kingdom of God come near. The Kingdom of God is the life of heaven made real in the here and now. That gift of God is made possible and made real through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. As saints, it's our job to help that kingdom come alive, to reflect the goodness of Jesus in all of our interactions, to shine the Gospel light at work and in our homes and with our friends. We're called to unbind heaven in our sisters and brothers so that we may all live lives more fit for God's kingdom right now. Today, we give thanks for those who helped make heaven a little more real in our lives, and we look forward as saints to working toward a fuller experience of God's kingdom in the world today. Though we are sinners, God makes us saints for this, calls us out of the grave to help reshape the world. Our unbinding of others, of helping the world leave behind the trappings of death and instead embracing life? That's living out heaven now. That's

helping God's kingdom to come even nearer. What a great thing to be a saint in the image of God. Amen.