

All Saints Sunday
November 4, 2018
John 11:32-44

Grace to you and peace...

Each week we are invited to bring our whole selves into the presence of God and this community when we come for worship. In the wisdom of the liturgy we are invited to begin by telling the truth about ourselves and our world, and receive the blessed reminder that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Each week we know that our whole selves are welcome...but in practice it's quite a different story. If the grief is too fresh; if the diagnosis is too scary; if the sorrow reduces us to tears in unexpected moments...we often stay away. Many of us are reluctant to let our tears show in the midst of the gathered saints. Others are embarrassed if evidence of recent weeping is too obvious.

But on some holy days we manage to make space for the entirety of human experience within our worship space. Today is one such day.

So who is with you today? Who is lingering in your heart and mind? For whom did you light a candle in loving remembrance? What names are hovering in your consciousness, whispering of days gone by, of memories past? Who are the saints you are remembering on this All Saints Sunday? What sorrow is weighing down your heart?

All those names, those memories, those moments of grief, or loss, or regret – all of them are welcome here. We are standing on holy ground. It is sacred work to let our hearts be broken open.

Such grief is the setting for our Gospel story. The first words bring us to Mary at Jesus' feet, pouring out her disappointment and her sorrow that her brother has died. Mary's tears, and those of the surrounding Jewish crowd who shares her grief, cause Jesus himself to be "deeply moved," and "greatly disturbed in spirit." Jesus begins to weep. And, rather than distancing himself from the suffering he is witnessing, Jesus enters more deeply into the heart of it. Rather than pointing to some future horizon where weeping and death will be no more, Jesus brings the presence of God to the place of suffering in the present moment.

Who among us has not prayed that a loved one might be spared from death? We, like Mary, expect that if Jesus had only been with us, our beloved would not have died. Jesus, on the other hand, seems determined to reveal the glory of God in the place where the stench of death most threatens.

I began this past week feeling burdened and carrying the heavy weight of grief. Like you, I mourn the senseless hatred that took the lives of 11 people at prayer in Tree of Life synagogue. I'm troubled by the ever more visible anti-Semitism, racism, and general demonizing of those perceived as "other" that is highlighted in the individual moved to murder. Sharing the heavy news last week of a member having been sexually assaulted weighed on me as I thought of her trauma and of the grief being experienced by you who love her.

For a day or so I let myself linger in the sadness, near despair. I wanted to be honest about the sorrow in the world and in my life. I gave myself permission to feel the pain, to acknowledge the deep loss that comes in so many ways. And then I heard a word of resurrection hope. From a Jewish Rabbi.

An imam, a Lutheran pastor, and Rabbi Marcia Zimmerman of Temple Israel, were being interviewed in light of the Tree of Life shooting, and what it means to come together as people of faith. As I listened, the Rabbi responded to a question about keeping the faith in the face of evil. She said, "I don't have time to become disheartened. I don't have the luxury of pulling the covers over my head...I need to tell people not to be afraid."

That was exactly what I needed to hear. And that, I believe, is what is at the heart of the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the tomb. Death is real. Suffering is real. We are not protected from the pain of life. But it does not have the last word. And for that reason we do not need to be afraid.

Jesus did not keep his friend Lazarus from dying. But he wasn't afraid of Mary and Martha's tears. He wasn't afraid to go with them to the tomb; and he wasn't afraid to engage with the reality of death itself. Experiencing the depth of human emotions Jesus called out life in the midst of death.

Today we acknowledge the reality of our grief and loss. We dare to name those who are no longer with us in this life. We remember those who have gone before us and whose absence causes our hearts to ache. And in the naming of those who have died we are reminded too of the other suffering and sorrow that surrounds us. Children suffering from lack of food; parents

desperate to find safety for their families in an unknown country; millions forced from their homes because of war or famine or fire or flood. Hurtful rhetoric that destroys human dignity. Policy decisions that place undue burdens on those who can least bear it. The list of heartaches is long.

Today, in this holy space, we dare to let our pain be seen, to speak it, to acknowledge it, to weep over it. We risk digging up the pain, rolling away the stone that keeps it locked away and hidden. Jesus weeps with us. And reveals the glory of God.

To Lazarus Jesus calls, “Come out.” Come out of your tomb.

And Jesus calls to us as well: “come out.”

Come out of your fear and your pride; come out of your addiction; come out of your hatred or your despair; come out of your perfectionism or your need to control; come out of isolation and independence. There is nothing known to humankind that is beyond the reach of God’s love revealed in Christ. Come out.

And Jesus’ call contains one thing more. To those who are ravaged by grief, choked with tears, watching for the presence of God – certain, or fearful, or daring to risk, Jesus says, “unbind him and let him go.” We are invited to participate in the work of liberation.

- Unbinding those who are erased for their gender identity or sexual orientation
- Unbinding those who have skin of a color different from our own
- Unbinding those who speak another language or who practice another faith

- Unbinding those who are caught in systems designed to keep them bound in poverty
- Unbinding those who are differently-abled, physically or mentally
- Unbinding those who are recovering from addiction
- Unbinding those who have been released from jail or prison and are starting over

And

- Unbinding those who are blinded by hatred, prejudice, bigotry, greed, or fear of losing their status or privilege.

We gain the ability to unbind others when we allow the stone covering our own tomb of darkness to be rolled away.

Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the tomb was the last of his signs in John's gospel. It was the precipitating event that caused the authorities to seek a way to put him to death. You see, a people not afraid of death are a people who cannot be stopped, and that is a risk no human authority wants to face. Once we realize that death is not the last word we are free to risk everything for the sake of the flourishing of God's creation.

And that is why we name the saints that have gone before us. We name our loss and that we have not been undone. We name their death, and that they are not forgotten. We acknowledge their holiness and claim that holiness for ourselves. We tell the truth before God and this community. Especially on this day. And every time we gather.

Amen.