

On this All Saints’ Day we take time to grieve and celebrate the saints. Grief is not a stranger in my life. I lost three grandparents by the time I was twelve and all my grandparents by the time I was twenty-six. With each church I have served I have lost many beloved congregation members all with their own special place in my heart.

At the first church I served I was blessed to form a special bond with the Administrative Assistant, named Donna. She became like a second mother to me as most of the time it was just the two of us at the church. We were there for each other and helped each other run errands.

Then Donna had another recurrence of cancer, one she would not survive, and I bore witness to cancer taking over her body. Donna put up a good fight and worked up until the day she died. She loved the Lord and served Him with every breath she took.

It was devastating for me and the church to lose Donna. Coming to work each day after she passed was very difficult. On this All Saints’ Day I remember the beautiful times we had, the lessons she taught me, and I miss her. I celebrate her as one of the great saints in my life.

I imagine you also have lost many wonderful people in your lives: family and friends, and even beloved pets. We all have known grief at some point in our lives, that is our human experience of love. Yet, through our faith in Jesus Christ, we are reminded that Christ can conquer even death and even the depths of despair of our grief.

In our Scripture today from Ezekiel we see that God is the one who speaks life to those who experience bodily death. Through Ezekiel’s vision we find comfort on this All Saints’ Sunday that those whose bodies turn into dust are made alive through their faith and God’s love.

This Scripture speaks to us on many levels today. It made me also think about the state of our souls. As we hear about those dry bones in the middle of the valley, I wonder if our spiritual lives are feeling a bit dry today.

Our spiritual bones cry out for music to be sung again, for us to embrace again, for us to all gather to worship, and for our favorite events to occur. On this day as we are missing many of the saints, we confess that our spiritual bones may be feeling a little dusty. We confess that we long for Christ’s living water and that we are parched. We confess that the exhaustion and stress caused by the pandemic has caused a deep level of tiredness that we feel all the way down to our very bones.

We resound with the song: “Precious Lord Take My Hand” where we sing: “Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand, I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.”<sup>1</sup>

The balm we yearn for our weary souls is contained in Ezekiel’s vision. God instructs Ezekiel to prophesy God’s word to the bones and Ezekiel listen’s to God’s command. Then something amazing happens.

The bones begin to clatter, they gather together and soon skin forms around them, but they are not alive until the breath of God enters their lungs.

This same breath of God which brought life to Adam and Eve, is the breath of God that fell upon those who experienced Pentecost. This same breath of God, the Holy Spirit, beckons to us, that we too may hear the word of God and respond. This same Holy Spirit continues to give us breath and move as forward even in times of deep grief. This same Holy Spirit binds us for life to one another to care for each other in the name of God.

In the Bible we see that many people experienced grief and that the community of God responded and cared for them. In the book of Ruth, we see how a family responds to grief. At the beginning of this book we find this family traveling after losing three very important people. Naomi was on her way back to her home country to search for food and a place to live after her husband and two sons died.

As she walked with her two daughters-in-law, we can imagine that she felt the tension of obligation and she named it. At first Orpah and Ruth say they will not leave her and that they will return to her home with her. But after Naomi is persistent and tells them to “turn back” a second time, Orpah takes this opportunity to say goodbye and leave.<sup>2</sup> Ruth, however, decides to stay with Naomi. The Bible tells us she “clung to her.”<sup>3</sup>

Ruth surely realized that Naomi was speaking out of grief, and that if she left, Naomi may not survive on her own. Naomi was in a bad place. She even wanted to change her name to bitterness to reflect the way she felt towards God.<sup>4</sup> She had lost everything, and, in trying to rid her daughters of their obligation, I believe she was simply preparing to die. In her mind, she had nothing left to live for. In that moment, Ruth realized she had a decision to make.

She, too, had the option to walk away and start over afresh. But that day Ruth showed Naomi that the bonds of family go beyond blood and the bonds of obligation go beyond legalities.

Ruth claimed Naomi as her own and gave her a new purpose for living, reminding Naomi that she had worth, even if she felt worthless. Ruth fully surrendered herself when she put the needs of Naomi above her own. As a result, instead of choosing death and despair, Naomi chose life, all because her daughter-in-law showed her that she was important and loved.

Ruth models for us what it means to take part in the community of God. Through our faith in Jesus Christ, we also offer ourselves to our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are bound to these people through our commitment to God, and we are obligated to care for those whom God has placed in our care, especially those who are grieving.

We are bound together because we are all in a time of waiting. Jesus’ second beatitude: “Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4), is not about people who are in mourning from losing a loved one. This passage of scripture refers to all of us who are mourning because the kingdom of God has not yet been fully realized.<sup>5</sup>

Like those Christ was referring to, we are also living in this in-between time of already and not yet. Christ has already come, and Christ will come again, but He is not here yet. While we wait, we do find ourselves mourning. We mourn for all those who have died due to the corona virus. We mourn for people suffering in mind, body, and spirit. We mourn for the families of the ten congregation members that we are remembering today. We mourn that our country is divided, and that civility is dead. We have much to mourn as we witness all the hurt and trauma people are experiencing in the world.

Mourning is a part of who we are as people of God. We mourn because we love those who are God’s gift to us in the body of Christ. We mourn, but in our mourning, we cannot lose hope...because the good news is that Christ will return and when He does as Revelations 21:4 says: “Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”

So instead of getting lost in our grief, we are called to be thankful. Today we are thankful for the saints. People who have been signs to us that the kingdom of God is near. People who have modeled for us with faith looks like. People we will never forget who laid the foundation of our faith. People whose presence we can feel within these walls today.

**So we do pause to grieve, but in our grief, we give thanks to God because the good news for us today is that God will continue to bring life out of death.**

The good news is that today when we have communion, we remember that the communion table stretches into eternity with Christ our host.

The good news is that through our faith God’s love for us will never end. So, in this time of mourning and grief, may we always find time to pause and give thanks that God is with us offering us hope.

We in Rappahannock County find this hope so often in God’s creation. We resound with Psalm 121 because when we grieve, we lift our eyes to the beautiful hills and God meets us there. Through this astounding view of creation we are reminded that the beautiful leaves die, leaving us in the grief of winter, but come springtime new life is all around us.

Even in our times of grief, may we continue to find moments to give God thanks for all the ways the saints have shaped us. May we also take on the holy obligation of shaping others all for the glory of God. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

---

During our time of remembering the saints we will read these names of our beloved saints, toll the bell and light a candle. May you be in prayer for the families of all the saints:

Frances Hudson (FH) – 11/16/19  
Athena Bywaters (FH) – 11/28/19  
Rosa Didawick (WC) – 1/6/20  
Mary Jenkins (WC) - 3/31/20  
Charles Whorton (S) - 4/17/20  
Charles Foster (FH) – 7/1/20

Rodney Vest Sr. (FH) – 7/8/20  
Ce Pike (S)- 8/8/20  
Dorothy Walters (WC) 8/29/20  
Kim Baader-Kilby (S) 10/30/20

### Endnotes

---

<sup>1</sup> The United Methodist Hymnal. P. 474.

<sup>2</sup> Ruth 1:12, NRSV.

<sup>3</sup> Ruth 1:14, NRSV.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth 1:20, NRSV.

<sup>5</sup> “The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary.” Vol. VIII. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 1995.

Additional Resource

Leander Keck et al. The New Interpreter’s Biblical Commentary. Vol. V. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 2015. P. 339-341.