

Our Inheritance

Ephesians 1: 11-23

Before we begin the sermon, I would like to invite everyone to please take out the list of names again, the list of the saints we celebrate and remember this year. For some, these names are just that...names on a list. They represent people we did not have the privilege of knowing and it is our loss.

For others, these names are our loved ones, our friends, our families, our past co-workers, this list of names represent our past and our present reality.

The people listed here, for some of us, we can still see their faces. We can still hear their laughs. Because these things greet us every time we see our reflection in the mirror. The people listed here, for some of us, we remember them every time a certain word or phrase is spoken because the memories come flooding back, memories which are so real that we could swear that they were happening right now.

For the people listed here, for the people listed every year, for the people we celebrate as saints, we give thanks because their names, our memories, even the glimpses which we see in our children, in our grandchildren, in our great grandchildren, all these things serve as reminders of our connection to all generations, past, present and future.

It always fascinates me that so many communities of faith have not reclaimed the tradition of All Saints Day. Too many think it will only bring up the pain and sorrow which surrounds our loss. Rather, All Saints Day is a way to remember that this person, our loved one existed, that he or she mattered. One of the worse things about loss is that people are so afraid to mention our loved ones to us because they don't want to cause us more pain. But the reality is, the not talking, the not being able to share the stories of our loved ones is what really hurts because it creates this expansive gap for those who are experiencing the loss. The rest of the world moves on and the one with the grief is left behind.

Being able to celebrate, to remember, to talk about our loved ones who have gone on before us helps their light shine just a little brighter. It is this light which brings healing to those of us who grieve. It is this light which points the way home for us, this light which was in the beginning when God created the Earth, this light which chases away the darkness. It is this light which connects us to something beyond ourselves.

By naming our loved ones, by celebrating them, as people of faith, we are reminded that their story is part of a larger narrative, a narrative which tells us that "God's story is their story", a story which transforms ordinary people into the holy, a story where grace abounds, a story where imperfect, broken, people are turned into saints.

Today, this list of names proclaims that new life abounds because of God's love. Today, this list of names signifies what we know already as people of faith: That nothing will ever separate us from the love of God. Not our fears, not our worries about tomorrow, nor life or death, nothing will ever separate us from the love of God.

For me, I can think of no other message which the world, which we need to hear right now. No matter what, no matter what the journey may bring, no matter if we make some bad life choices and get ourselves into a pickle? Like maybe get kicked out of the garden of Eden? Notice God is over here knitting us clothes. Or if we throw a little fit and demand our inheritance or if we spend it all and find ourselves surrounded by pig manure? Prodigal child—God is not going to come and pull us out of the manure—but God will absolutely be waiting for us with a giant party when we are ready.”

God's story tells us over and over again that we are caught up in the love of Creator of the Universe and nothing can ever change that.”

This knowledge is more precious than silver. It is more costly than gold. It will supply our needs more than any monetary wealth this world may bring our way. This knowledge of God's love is our inheritance. It was given to us by our ancestors so that we would always know the promises of our God. This inheritance

opens the door for us to a life beyond our imagining. This inheritance is the knowledge that we are part of the ongoing, world changing redemptive work of God which time and time again tells us that this world will not have the last word but that God's love and God's grace will.

And nothing, not even death, can take this inheritance away from us. It is ours forevermore.

I shared earlier this week in my Theology Tuesday that I love how the Message version translated the first part of this text, "It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone."

But what really captured my attention in this text, especially as we are lifting up the losses of loved ones, as we are lifting up our hurts and sadness, especially as we come into God's presence, in need of some good news in this crazy mixed world, what really captured my attention in this text was this part:

"The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence."

For me, this image of the church, this image of the Body of Christ being the center which radiates love and grace out to the margins, this image of the community of faith being the center reframing the narrative on power and might to a narrative of welcome and hope is what faith is really all about. It is the sitting around tables together at church potlucks, sharing stories, it is the supporting one another along the journey, it is the knowing we are connected which makes our faith real and always gives us glimpses of the Kingdom of God in our midst.

You see, all these experiences remind us that we worship a risen Savior. That's why Paul tells us, O Death "Where is your sting?" O Grave Where is your victory?" Paul knew, just like our ancestors in faith knew that our inheritance is filled with the promises of God. Our inheritance reminds us that pain and sorrow are only part of the narrative we tell. As people of faith, we know that death and fear will never be what determines how we live our lives in the here and now. As ones who worship a risen Savior, we know there is another way and it is a way of life and love, a way of hope and grace. It is a way which continues to defy the powers of hurt and hate of this world.

Or let me say it this way: On Monday morning, when I was reviewing my to do list, I remembered that I needed to run to GFS to pick up supplies for our community dinner that night. Suddenly, this became more than a task. It became a life line for me, something solid I could wrap my mind around, wrap my arms

around in my despair with the world. I knew the healing power which comes when we gather around the Table as a community...neighbor breaking bread with neighbor, stranger being welcomed as a Beloved child of God, children laughing together, good food nourishing our bodies and our souls. Suddenly, this task of picking up supplies for our community dinner became a sign, reminding me that in our grief, in our joy, in our pain, in our sorrow, in all our times in between, as people of faith, we are called to come together as a community, to break bread with one another, coming together often times in spite of our different ideologies, in spite of our visible differences, even in spite of our differing political views, we are called to come together as a community, as one.

Because ultimately, when we do this, we proclaim, loud and clear, that God is here, holding us, surrounding us, inviting us to come into God's presence so that we can and will always know that this world does not have the last word.

Again...these are not just words we speak on Sunday mornings. These are not just platitudes we offer to ease the pain. These words are statements of faith. These words are what anchor us in the midst of life's ups and downs. These words are our present reality as people of faith here and now. These words are our inheritance passed down to us by our ancestors in faith. It is the knowledge that no matter what, God's love will overcome any darkness we might face. This is our inheritance as beloved children of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.