

God Raises Us

All Saints Day, November 3, 2024

1 Kings 17:17-24; Psalm 149; Mark 5:21-24, 35-42

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Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

Well folks, it's All Saints Day. I mean, it's a big deal. And it has been for many centuries. As early as the 300's Christians have been gathering around this time of year to remember those who have gone before us in the faith. Last week, we celebrated Reformation Sunday. But in all the hubbub, its easy for us to forget why Luther chose to post his 95 theses on the church door that day- it's because people were going to be in town celebrating All Saints' Day the next day. If Luther had chosen an ordinary Tuesday, nobody would have cared.

But why do we celebrate it? Why do we come up here, year after year, to light a candle? AS I reflected on this question, I think that there's a couple reasons.

The first reason is for us to remember that the church is Christ's body. It belongs to him. We take the light from the Paschal Candle that represents Christ's light and light a candle for those whom we love who have gone to await the resurrection. But it all comes from Jesus. And it reminds us that the church is more than just us.

Too often, we like to pretend that now is the only moment that matters. Even Christians do this. But the truth is much more. Christ's body is much more than us in the here and now. The body of Christ belongs to the faithful believers out there, buried in the churchyard too. Jude tells us in his letter that the faith was delivered to all of the Saints. That includes you, of course. But who delivered it to you? It was God's faithful people of ages past. The Apostles. The church fathers. The reformers. Saints of every age. And those that you love. Parents, grandparents, pastors of ages past. Dear friends and family who have gone to their eternal rest. All a part of what Hebrews 10 calls "the great cloud of witnesses."

This is who Christ's bride is. Faithful Christians of every age, including our own, and those yet to come. Just as we light a candle for Christians who have passed, someday someone will be lighting a candle for you. It reminds us that someday, each of us will join that "great cloud of witnesses" that has delivered the faith to a new generation of God's people that belongs to Jesus.

The next reason that I could think of was so beautifully illustrated to us by Curtis and his mom and dad just a few moments ago. St. Paul tells us in Romans chapter 6 what happens when we were baptized. The apostle writes:

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.

The cruel reality of life is that death is a thing. All of us have been touched by this ancient enemy of humankind at some point in our lives. But as I often tell you, God didn't just leave us and say, "well, sucks to be you!" No, he loved his creation. Jesus tells us in John 3:16 that "God so loved the world that he sent his one and only son." And that one and only son shared in our humanness in every way. He ate, he slept, he got angry, he cried. And, eventually, he died too. But he died in a different way. He was offered up on the cross as the sacrifice so that way our sins could be forgiven. And then he did the most unexpected thing, he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday.

So then, as little Curtis just showed us, when we were baptized, we were baptized into that same death. The death on the cross that fulfilled the blood debt that our sins have accumulated over the eons. But just like Christ showed us on the events of Holy Week, the story didn't end on Good Friday. If it did, then it wouldn't be "Good" Friday. It would have just been the day on which a prophet died, just like all of the prophets that came before. But that isn't what happened. Instead, Easter happened. Jesus rose from the dead.

And just as Jesus rose from the dead, we shall too. For if we have been united by baptism into Good Friday, then we too get to share in Easter Sunday. We get a resurrection too. This is one of the reasons why we light candles on All Saints Day. So that when we remember those that we love who have passed away in Christ, we can remember the resurrection that comes with Christ, and that gives us hope.

In our first reading from today, which comes from the First Book of Kings, we see what this sort of resurrection can look like. For those of us that are visitors today, for the last couple months we have been looking at the story of the Old Testament. Last week, we looked at the reign of Solomon, and how God built up his Temple and kept his promises to the good old king David. In this Old Testament story, we see the prophet Elijah. Now, just prior to this story, Scripture tells us how Elijah was on the run. He was on the run from an evil king of Israel, a man named Ahab. Unlike David, Ahab didn't trust in God. He openly worshipped other gods and trusted in alliances with Syria and Lebanon rather than the Lord. The prophet Elijah told the king of God's disapproval and judgment against him, and then went on the run to stay safe from the king. He took a rest with a widow and her son, but after a while, the widow's son died.

And she is angry about it. Angry at God, and angry at Elijah as God's representative. She cries out

What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?"

I do have to point out that just like other Bible stories, your children are everything. Especially as a widow, this woman has no husband to care for her. And now, she has no son to care for her as she ages. In a world with no social security, no safety net, and very limited means for a woman to make a living, she has lost everything. Add to that the pain of a mother losing her only child, and it makes sense why she is so mad at God.

And this is not an unreasonable position to take. Even Elijah cries out against God, and he's like the number one prophet of the Old Testament. He says:

LORD my God, have you brought tragedy even on this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?"

It's natural for us to get angry at God when death strikes against us. Why does God cause such tragedy to happen? It's not fair! This woman welcomed Elijah into her home at great personal risk. Remember he's on the run from the king. If Ahab found out he was hiding out there, she could be killed! And this is the thanks she gets?

Often times we can feel the same way when tragedy strikes. We get angry with God. And often times, the way we "get even" with God is to pull away from him and lash out at those who represent him, the church, just like the widow did. But it's important for us to remember, even in those darkest of times, that God has done something about it. Elijah the Prophet prayed that God would bring the widow's child back to life. The same thing happens in our Gospel reading when Jesus raises Jairus' daughter to life.

The point is, the Lord is a God of life. God doesn't revel in death. He doesn't get some sort of sick glee out of it as some people might think. It's not like some people say when people die, "God needed another angel." No. God doesn't want death. And the death of those who love him is something he mourns too, just as Jesus cried when his friend Lazarus died. Scripture tells us in Psalm 116 that "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful servants."

But as the widow pointed out, death has a way of reminding us of our sins, since we know as St. Paul said "the wages of sin is death." That's why this happens. But

that's not how God left us. Even though the widow was angry at God, God raised her son back to life. Even though the crowds laughed in disbelief, Jesus raised the little girl to life. The timing may not be the same, but God does the same for us in our grief.

Scripture tells us in 1st Thessalonians 4 that:

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

That's the reason why we light a candle on All Saints' Day. We light it from the Paschal Candle that reminds us of the presence of Christ and what he did for us. And the lighting of that candle reminds us of how in our baptisms we were united with Christ not only in his death, but in his resurrection as well. And that same light from Jesus is what brings us life, just how God raised the widow's son and Jairus' daughter. We light those candles to remind ourselves that in this dark world, Christ is our light and our hope and the words of Hebrews 10:17 are true, that God says through Christ "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."

This time of year, called Hallowtide, is a special time. Yes, it's meaning can get lost in the shuffle of Halloween costumes, candy, and even good things like Reformation Day or the upcoming election. But it's this day, when we come to hear about what God has in store for us through Christ, and to light a candle to remind us of that hope in the resurrection we all share as believers in Christ, just as our forefathers and mothers in the faith did before us, that the meaning of All Saints' Day and because of it, All Hallow's eve comes clear. As I close, again, I'll point to little Curtis. Through our baptisms, we belong to Christ. Thanks be to God for that. Amen.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for binding us together with your saints of ages past in your holy church. Thank you for putting people into our lives to show us what being a Christ-follower looks like in our normal day to day lives. And finally, Lord, thank you for claiming us as your own in our baptisms, so that through you we may share in the resurrection of your son. We pray this through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Election Prayer

Almighty God, to whom we must account for all our powers and privileges, guide the people of the United States in the election of officials and representatives, that by faithful administration and wise laws, the rights of all may be protected and our nation be enabled to fulfill your purposes, through Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.