

Sermon for 7 November 2021 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore  
Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost/All Saints Sunday  
Scriptures: Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 24; Revelation 21:1-6a; John 11:32-44  
***“Tomorrow and tomorrow...”***

“Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow/Creeps in this petty pace from day to day/To the last syllable of recorded time...”

The contrast between Shakespeare’s Macbeth, and this annual day in the church’s worship cycle, gets us off to a proper start.

So, let us go immediately to the heart of what All Saints Sunday exposes: our capacity to go as high as we can go low.

Open-minded people have learned to honor mysticism about both the beginning and the end of everything.

Einstein in particular left us beautiful quotes about ultimate truth and meanings; and the heroic refusal of key scientists to complete the atomic bomb is one as example of what to do instead of fighting.

Then Isaiah says clearly there is every reason to expect the God of the Hebrews to turn darkness into light. In my lifetime, the most dramatic example of that has been the failure of the Holocaust to destroy Judaism.

We Christians have our own examples of hopefulness and goodwill.

Lazarus rises again, after his funeral and burial, and the Church emerges.

I watch this in the hospital sickroom, in the dark night of my own soul, in the beauty of the seasons and the exchange of passion and trust with humans and other beings. I find it in other religions. I discover over and over. I believe in the power of love over death.

I watch this faith work in my own character, the way I can tame the hurt and fearful child still left within me from my own family and school and general life experience. I learn this is the main purpose of life. Unless I “grow up,” little by little and stage by stage, I never fulfill the aims of nature planted in me from the beginning. Even my failures don’t defeat the picture, for others are able to learn from my mistakes.

There is, thus, a triumph in the whole picture that overwhelms any depression we feel in parts of it... and that is what this day symbolizes.

We name specific people important to us, to encourage ourselves, and so others may see and try trusting. Religion works that way, always going from the personal to equality for all.

All this sounds stiff and wordy ... but the real flavor of this occasion is rambunctious, flag-waving, shouting and singing and dancing. This is a BIG DEAL, and even if we are too timid or scared, too small in our self-appraisal, or still too fresh in our grief to let loose, it helps to hear the cymbals and drums, the sopranos and violins, and all those things the Bible mentions when it really wants to cut loose and insist and promise. We know it's there. From the beginning of the Bible's song-book, the "Psalter" or "The Psalms," to its end, there's noise that drowns out everything else. God is in charge, and God, scripture insists, does big things, things that last, good things we are invited to support

So, please let this precious time together inspire the rest of your year. This is what it's all about. Not that foolish despair we spoke of so poignantly at the beginning. Shakespeare was a genius, but all he was up to in that sad Macbeth moment, was to show us how foolish we look like when we give up and turn away from all the bread and roses spread along our pathways, this day and all days, all nights, all seasons, All Saints ... which is what Jesus people call one another. Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and always.

Amen.