

3 November 2024 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

All Saints Sunday

Scriptures: Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalter : 755 (*Response 1*) Psalm 24 ; Revelations 21 :1-6a ; John 11 :32-44

Sermon

So many themes call to us in today's scriptures! The great prophet of sympathy and hope, Isaiah, is the basis of our first reading; but scholars have established that the real producer of today's passage is a much later figure who lived just a century before Jesus, who blended the original confidence of individual peace that the faithful can expect, with a broader vision of renewal for all things and all time.

Psalm 24 connects with all sorts of annual pilgrimages, and reminds us that singing and praying and blessing are a resource open to all kinds of people, over the centuries.

Revelation 21's vision of "a new heaven and a new earth" adds to the picture of creation being an on-going operation, encouraging where there is present darkness, expanding our vision and dreams.

And the Gospel, changing today to the Gospel of John, the church has produced and preserved, insists on "Now!" as well as what was and what is to come, insists that we include in every experience of darkness that there is light somewhere nearby, just as in every moment of joy there is sorrow. In all things, God is alive and already here! We are part of eternal life now! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the end and the beginning!" Jesus insists... and then turns to us with the never-ceasing question, "Do you believe this?"

I always approach this day with trepidation. How can I describe what I most trust in? How can I risk interfering with what you have been given to bring the whole picture into focus? Certainly, from year to year, and decade to decade, my experience of death and my friendship with those who have died changes my outlook. For sure my view is always limited and may challenge that of others.

What comes alive this year, when we have such a large list of names, is the friendship that faithful living provides. We are more sensitive to the weakness and the sublime strength of aging as the decades pass. We are also given more extended connections, just because we remain and have longer appreciation for shared times and similar experiences.

As we share the simple act of Holy Communion this time, may the Lord use all our emotions for the better understanding we are challenged to act on, with all ages, and all types of character. May we learn more about building through both tears and laughter, uncertainty and steadiness, and the importance of both mind and heart. May the honor of listing in our service many who have been both distant and profoundly close alert us to God's presence among us everywhere.

Last, may we give thanks that God is so kind and so close, yet up ahead working on a new age we can't yet see. May we lay some of the groundwork for what's up ahead. God's grace, holds everything together.

In Christ's name we say,

Amen.