

Text: John 11:32-44; Rev 21:1-6
Theme: Saints Alive!
#978

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All Saints' Sunday
November 4, 2018

Mary's statement of grief at the death of her brother Lazarus is a common emotion felt by us as well. We ask where God may be in the midst of the tragedies we experience. I'm reminded of the book by Elie Wiesel, *Night*, in which he tells the story of a young boy who was hanged in a Jewish concentration camp. As he struggled between life and death, his life slowly ebbing away, someone watching in horror asked, "**Where is God now?**"

Wiesel remembers saying to himself, "**Where is He? Here He is—He is hanging here on this gallows.**" (pp. 61-62)

As we approach the tragedies that have taken place over the past couple weeks, the question is also asked, "Where is God now?" The answer is the same—God is there—in the midst of the Tree of Life synagogue; God is with those who were meant to be victims of pipe bombs; God is in the midst of yet another school shooting.

It is here that our Lutheran teaching of the "Theology of the Cross" becomes such a powerful belief. We believe that in the midst of the tragedies in life—whether they be global, national, or personal—God reaches out to us from the cross. When Jesus gave Himself up to die on

the cross, He reached out to us with arms wide open to embrace our grief and suffering. He took our sin upon Himself, and He died for us—as well as for all who are grieving losses of any magnitude. Jesus died for us. He died so that we might be forgiven as He carried our sins to the cross.

Our understanding of the cross and our Lord's death is that we have a God who knows firsthand the pain and grief and suffering we face in life. Jesus has felt it. And God knows the pain of losing a Son. God is with us in the midst of our grief and loss—whatever that grief and loss may be. It doesn't have to be death; it doesn't have to be physical; it can be emotional and psychological suffering as well.

On All Saints' Sunday we acknowledge all those who have gone before us in faith; all who have suffered for their faith; all who have been martyred because of their beliefs; and all who have died in faith, knowing Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

This is a bittersweet sort of day. We remember our grief and our loss, but we acknowledge that all who die in faith live in Christ. Our lessons today underscore this belief. Isaiah writes of the feasting and joy in the Kingdom of God, John's Revelation tells of the awesome transformation that will occur in the heavenly kingdom where there will be no more suffering, weeping, death, or grief. We have the promise of the Risen

Christ who speaks the powerful words of hope. It will be as He has promised.

And Jesus, in the story of Lazarus, foreshadows the power of the Resurrection as He raises His dear friend from death. As Jesus called Lazarus out of death to life, Jesus calls us not just out of death, but out of the **fear** of death—even our own death.

The story of Jesus raising Lazarus is as compelling and pertinent for us today as it was for Mary and Martha. It reminds us that even God's work of Resurrection is not quite complete—as we await the triumphant return of Jesus. In faith we look forward to the coming Kingdom of God when Jesus restores the lives of those believers who have gone before us.

As the first witnesses to raising Lazarus were drawn to Jesus words, “Unbind him, and let him go,” we too wait for Jesus to unbind us from our bondage to sin and death. We wait for the unbinding freedom of the Kingdom of Heaven to come among us.

So today comes with a mixed blessing: we know that there is still suffering, pain, and death in this world; but we celebrate the Promise of Jesus Christ that those who believe will find the joy of the Kingdom of Heaven. We grieve our losses in this life, but we celebrate the lives of those who have gone before us in faith. We look forward to the coming

Kingdom of God, while we know that the work of the Church is not complete. We believe the promise of New Life is real and is waiting for all believers as we do the work of Christ to share that Good News.

AMEN, Come Lord Jesus!