

## **“You Are Not Forgotten”**

Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18, Luke 6:20-31

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Today is All Saints Day when we remember those who have gone before us and we remember their love. Why do we celebrate All Saints Sunday? Because we honor the love that God provided through our Saints or, in other words, anyone in our lives who influenced us through their love. While I was preparing for today’s message, a short story that I found in my readings touched my heart and it has been lingering in my mind through the whole week. The story is short and very simple. And it reminds me of how Jesus taught about love, comfort, and God’s blessings to those in despair. A little girl came home from a neighbor’s house where her little friend had died. “Why did you go?” questioned her father. “To comfort her mother,” said the child. “What could you do to comfort her?” “I climbed into her lap and cried with her.”

In our New Testament reading, when Jesus was about to preach God’s blessings, he was quickly surrounded by a huge congregation. There were many people who wanted to receive God’s blessings as we all do in our time. But Jesus’ message was quite strange from our perspectives. Why did Jesus lift up people who had lost it all, who were hungry, and who were grieving and full of sorrow. A theologian and philosopher, Paul Tillich, in his little book, *The Dynamics of Faith* defined faith as a “state of being ultimately concerned”. Jesus’ ultimate concern was not to find perfect people. He wouldn’t wish to make people rich and successful in their business either. For example, if you are healthy, you don’t need a doctor at this time. If you are perfect and happy in your life, you probably feel that you don’t need God now. Jesus wasn’t interested in perfect, flawless and arrogant people. Instead, his ultimate concern was to care for the poor in spirit, those who are grieving, and who hunger and thirst. In Jesus’ time, these people were treated either as marginalized or disregarded as abandoned people in the community. The ultimate concern of Jesus’ ministry was to remember forgotten and lost ones in their lives and to bring them back to God as God’s chosen ones.

Our Old Testament reading is from the Book of Daniel. This book is full of prophecies, symbols and encoding messages. The Book of Daniel is like the Old Testament’s version of the Book of Revelation of the New Testament. In the Book of Daniel, Daniel is described as a young man of faith and piety. He is a role model of Jewish people. Even though he spent his entire life in Babylon, he

never gave up faith and he courageously avoided temptations. Daniel had a vision of God for the future of his nation, Israel. His vision was all about God's reign and rule over the world during a period of crisis and oppression. It seemed as if God had abandoned his promises to the Israelite. The people were depressed and hopeless. They yearned for a sign, a word, anything that might give them hope – a sense of God's presence in the midst of exile. Daniel's dreams were about God's hope and promise that they have not been forgotten. They were remembered.

The essence of Christianity is hope. The opposite word of hope is despair. For those who weep and mourn, Jesus Christ blessed them and shared God's comfort and consolation with them. So that they are remembered and they are not abandoned. Last week, I made a pastoral visit to one of our homebound church members. That person was so glad to see me, saying that she was afraid that she was forgotten. I told her that the church remembers her and prays for her. For those who are afraid to be forgotten, Jesus remembered and gave them a promise of God's blessings. As God assured the Jewish people that God still remembered and loved them through Daniel's vision, Jesus came to us as a shepherd of lost sheep, comforter for those who grieve and mourn and provider for the poor in spirit, hungry and thirsty. This is all about compassion, love, faith and hope. We are agents, followers of Jesus Christ who are called to continue this ministry through our church community and one another.

Our United Methodist Church keeps this Sunday as All Saints Sunday. Since we are not a Catholic church, we do not practice to commemorate living and dead Saints. Instead, we symbolically remember those who have shared their love with us in our earthly lives. Dietrich Bonhoeffer gave us a definition of saints in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*. He says, "The community of the saints is not a community of flawless people needing no repentance, but a people who truly live under the forgiving mercy of God." For remembering our loved ones who have gone before us, we put their names on these leaves and hung them on the tree on the altar table. I hope that we remember who taught us their great love and that we feel that we want to pass that love to others.

We, Christians are gathered here in the name of the church. What is the church's job? The church is a community of faith. Our call is to remember people who are lost and forgotten. We are invited to share compassion, friendship and genuine care for one another as Jesus Christ did. We never stop to share good news to those who are desperately seeking God's grace and mercy. The church's ultimate concern is to love God and to love our neighbors. That is what Jesus preached to his disciples. Amen.