“No More Tears: A Sermon for All Saints”

Sunday November 2, 2014 Grace UMC

Rev. Kate Hurst Floyd, Revelation 21:1-6

‘See, the home of God is among mortals.
God will dwell with them;
they will be God’s peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
God will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.’

What a beautiful, hope-filled, prophetic vision before us on this All Saints Sunday. The day in the life of the church when we remember those saints who have gone before us—we hear the names of members of this beloved community who have passed from this life to the next over the last year; lighting candles as a sign of the light of Christ, proclaiming the good news that death is not the end, but that each soul’s light shines on, for eternity. We remember those we’ve lost, this year and past years, whose names may not be read, but are written on our hearts and whose presence is still deeply missed, whether it’s been two months or two or twenty years.

And though we do, indeed, worship a God whose gift is eternal life through Jesus Christ, we do grieve, here on earth. The losses we suffer are very real; the tears we cry honor the love we shared, the complicated feelings we carry, the holes that will not be filled.

We gather together, on All Saints, to worship together as the body of Christ and remember the good news that God promises us a day when mourning and crying and pain will be no more, and God will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

Over the last year, I’ve become intimately acquainted with the act of wiping tears away. We have a little girl whose almost one (which is hard to believe…) and one of her primary ways of communicating is through tears. This was especially true in the earliest months. Now she increasingly points and babbles, crawls toward what she wants or needs, and she holds out her arms when she wants to be held.

But she still cries, especially when she’s tired, or in pain—teething or gas or something else—it’s hard to know - when she’s separated from people or places that are familiar or when she awakes in the middle of the night and can’t find her pacifier. One of our primary roles, as parents, is to meet her needs, to wipe away her tears.

And though I’ve been with many people as they’ve cried, and I’m grateful for the people who have been with me as I’ve cried…some of us have shared tears together…holding hands, passing tissues, sitting in silence or sharing stories and laughter through the pain, embracing or sitting across from one another…..the act of physically wiping away another creature’s tears is a new experience. A holy, sacred, intimate experience that is like no other. Hands caressing a face,
smoothing away water, finding the source of the pain and holding the beloved close until all the
ears stop.

THIS is what God promises us. This is who God is….not the one who hands us a tissue or tells a
funny story or says I’ll check on you tomorrow…

But the holy parent who comes to us, so close that our very tears, flowing from our eyes, are
wiped away. Needs that we didn’t even know we had, met with an embrace. Held close until the
pain ends.

What a beautiful, hope-filled, prophetic vision to have before us this all saints Sunday.

The vision before us, from the Book of Revelation, is of a new heaven and a new earth….the
coming kingdom where the sins of the world, the brokenness of our lives, is taken up and away
and we are all reconciled into the eternal world, the eternal city where nobody ever cries again.

This new city, the new Jerusalem, has been a hope and a promised reality for generation upon
generation. But it was thought of as a place where people go, separate from earth, escaping our
present reality and entering into God’s. We, as humans, do the moving.

What makes this vision from Revelation such a new thing, is that we aren’t going anywhere; God
comes to us. God’s kingdom, God’s vision, is here on earth dwelling among mortals; not the
other way around. Not a separate reality; intimate, incarnate coming to be with us. So close that
God’s hands reach our faces and wipe away our tears. Embracing us in our darkest hours, the
middle of the night, when we believe we are alone.

God says: MY home is among mortals. I will dwell with them.

We worship a God who is both intimate, tender, personal; AND is the powerful one who is able
to restore all of creation.

What a beautiful, hope-filled, prophetic vision we have before us this all saints Sunday.

On this day we do remember saints who have passed away; but the dead are not the only saints;
the word saint has different meanings in different traditions, but in The United Methodist
Church, we believe that all of us are saints. Paul uses the term 44 times in the New Testament.
The Greek word for saint is hagios—holy ones. Do you know what makes us holy?

The truth that God dwells with us….comes to earth in the person of Jesus Christ…intimately eats
with all manner of sinners, touches lepers and caresses women; hangs out with children and
places them at the center of a community who held them at the margins; weeps when his friend
Lazarus dies, …and redeems the whole world by rising from the dead.

We are holy, saints, not because of anything we do but because of what God has already done.
This is what makes us holy.

So on all saints, we not only remember the saints who have gone before, but celebrate all
saints….here and now and the ones to come. What does it mean for us to live, here on earth, as
God’s holy ones?
To worship a God whose greatest desire is to come to us, in the city, a holy city, and dwell among us?

Last week we heard prophetic words from Isaiah, beckoning us to “come to the waters”….to buy and eat food without price; to feast at God’s table and remember that our provision, our care, comes from God. We talked about the baptismal waters that seal us in covenant with the God who already covenants to dwell with us.

And how, as people who are recipients of the gift of God’s great care, God’s stewardship, we are called to be faithful stewards of our resources. Because they come, after all, from God. All that we are all that we have is from God, the one in whom we live and move and have our being. We left with pledge cards, prayerfully considering how we could give of our financial resources in 2015 to respond to the God who covenants to take care of us by taking care of God’s people through Grace church.

On the other end of our holy scriptures, the very last book of our bible, we hear echoes of Isaiah’s beckoning to the waters where God again proclaims: To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

God cares for us by wiping away the salty tears that stream from our face and offering up crystal clear, thirst-quenching water that never ends.

We are holy because we stand in the tradition of God’s prophets, before the vision of God’s kingdom where nobody goes thirsty.

What a beautiful vision, that moves through our faith tradition, our holy scriptures, and inspires us today.

What we do know is that here on earth, people are thirsty. And in pain and mourning; too many of God’s beloved creatures have tears streaming down their faces. As God’s holy ones, saints, what are we to do?

Be ambassadors of this beautiful, prophetic, hope-filled vision.

Knowing that the way things are, are not the way God desires them to be. And believing that with God’s help, we can participate in this vision here and now.

We tend to think of saints as people who are perfect, or pretty darn close: Mother Teresa, Thomas Aquinas, the Apostle Paul. Or saints as people who have passed on, and we can deify those who are dead if we’re not careful. But our loved ones weren’t perfect; Mother Teresa wasn’t perfect, and neither are we. But we are the people with whom God chooses to dwell. So how can we help but respond?

Our vision at Grace is about proclaiming God’s vision and trying to do our part, though imperfect, to help bridge the gap between the present reality and all that God has in store for us. Our vision is: to feed our surrounding community, spiritually and physically, reaching outward with God’s love while intentionally welcoming all in the name of Christ.
It’s interesting that where God dwells is a city…no offense to rural or suburban life…but for a church community that resides at the heart of a city, for a church who has said over the last year: we want to be a vital part of our diverse community, it’s compelling to meditate on the holy city, the new Jerusalem as God’s beloved community. Cities are places where people dwell closely together, crowded in close living quarters; we can’t help but be near one another, intimately; cities are diverse…ethnically and socio-economically and politically; within a mile of Grace lives an African American mother raising her 3 children; a Hispanic man who has been living with his partner in midtown for 30 years; college students crowded into a home on Charles Allen that’s been subdivided into apartments; and women who have no home, but dwell on these streets, seeking a safe place to spend the night, under the eaves of the church roof. This is where God chooses to dwell.

This is where Grace church dwells. What if we started to see our city through God’s eyes?

As a place where pain and hunger and mourning and thirst can be transformed into a community of people with hope and love at the center?

We’ve already put this vision at the center of who we are. Because of recent events, we will be freed up to focus our resources—time, money, gifts—on God’s vision. Feeding our community, so that nobody goes hungry; offering spiritual resources so that we do not thirst; following the God who comes to dwell with us by reaching outside these walls with God’s love—dwelling with our community; and welcoming all, all saints, in the name of Christ.

I hope you will pledge to give financially to Grace church in 2015, bringing your pledge card with you and leaving it on the altar rail for communion. Committing, financially to honor the saints of Grace who have come before, who are here now, and who we have yet to meet. Putting financial resources in the service of God’s vision.

Proclaiming, boldly, with our hearts and minds and hands and pocketbooks, that:

the home of God is among mortals.
God dwells with us;
we are God’s peoples,
and God is with us;
God will wipe every tear from our eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.’

May it be so. Thanks be to God! Amen.