

All Saints' Sunday, St. David's Episcopal Church, 11/5/2023 (Elizabeth Felicetti)

Our reading from the Revelation to John this morning is one often read at funerals, and in fact was one of the readings yesterday at Sue Johnson's funeral. It's especially beloved because of that last line with God wiping away every tear from the eyes of those robed in white from the great multitude who stood before the throne. We are comforted by the image of God wiping tears from the eyes of our loved ones.

All Saints' Sunday is one of the few days we actually hear readings from Revelation, a fantastical book that many of us have trouble understanding. I love that today's reading contains angels, because on All Saints Sunday I want to remind us all that according to the Bible, we don't become angels when we die. Angels are completely different creations. Many popular depictions of them today show beautiful blondes in gauzy nightgowns with golden wings and bare but carefully manicured toes, but angels in the Bible are terrifying, which is why one of the first things out of their mouths is often "don't be afraid."

We don't become angels when we die, but we become saints when we are baptized. Today, All Saints Sunday, we celebrate all of the saints: capital S saints like St. Peter and St. Francis, but also ordinary saints like Sue Johnson, whom we buried yesterday, who worked so hard and humbly behind the scenes with the altar guild and the Daughters of the King. Sue's name will be one of the ones we read this morning during the Eucharistic prayer.

Today we also get to welcome two new saints into the Christian family, Saint Sophie Elizabeth and Saint Benjamin David, who are about to be baptized. Because they are so young we don't know yet what their sainthood will look like, but in the Episcopal church, when children are baptized, we ask their parents and godparents to promise that by their prayers and witness they will help these children grow into the full stature of Christ. I know a little bit about the parents of these kids, so let me share a bit about them on this All Saints' Sunday.

Most of you know Amie Seay from her time on the vestry when she distinguished herself by her dedication and hard work. I asked Amie to serve not too long after her confirmation, knowing that her experience as a small business owner would benefit us greatly, and she exceeded my hopes. Both Amie and Kyle are extra special to me because I baptized both of them and also officiated at their wedding. When I think of that wedding, I think of standing at a window with Kyle looking out at the gathered congregation. I was struck by his excitement but also by how peaceful he seemed. I had been worried about this wedding because a hurricane was coming through, and the wedding was being held at St. Matthias instead of here because they invited more guests than would fit into our worship space.

The rector of St. Matthias had been asking me repeatedly what our plan B was. Amie, however, was determined that the hurricane was not going to mess up her wedding, and she was right.

Because of her strong will, when I was out for more months than expected after my cancer surgery earlier this year, I was comforted when I heard that Amie was determined that I would be the one to baptize Sophie Elizabeth. Amie was able to divert a hurricane, so I figured that if she said I was going to be well enough to baptize her baby, it was going to happen. And she was right. To me Amie's strong will exemplifies perseverance, as in the baptismal vow to persevere in resisting evil.

Most of you may not be familiar with Owen family, so let me tell you a little about them. Alex, the mom, is my primary care physician assistant and has been for quite a few years, including back when she was pregnant with Benjamin's big sister. Before Alex had to deal with all of my cancer, she had to deal with my anxiety and my aversion to taking medication. I knew she was the right medical professional for me when we were discussing a new medication, and she was telling me that I could not just randomly stop taking it as I often did with medication. "You have to taper off," she said to me. "Do you understand? So if you want to stop taking it, you need to talk to me, and we will discuss you tapering off a little at a time."

"But what if there's a zombie apocalypse?" I asked her, figuring that would stump her; but to my surprise, she didn't even blink. "If there's a zombie apocalypse, buy a machete," she said, "and if you decide you want to stop taking the medicine, you need to taper off."

I never bothered seeing any of the doctors from her practice after that. For me, it was Alex or nothing.

But there's much more to Alex than her sharpness and sense of humor. The first Sunday after I was diagnosed with breast cancer back in early 2020, Alex and her family showed up here at church. She wanted to make sure I was OK before I had even had a chance to schedule an appointment with her to discuss what the specialist had diagnosed. To me, on that Sunday, Alex brought to life the baptismal vow to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves. I cannot express how loved I felt seeing her here at St. David's that morning.

When I saw Alex in her medical office last fall, shortly before my cancer came back and before Benjamin was born, she asked me if I would baptize him. I clung to that the months that I was out. I prayed that I would get to baptize Benjamin.

And I prayed to baptize Sophie as well. Their parents are saints, and I trust that their godparents are, too. And [at the 10 o'clock] now we are going to make these babies true children of God and saints through their own baptisms.

On All Saints Sunday we honor all of the saints in our lives. We remember those who have died, both the few big names known by many as well as the many faithful who were known only by a few. During the Eucharistic prayer, I will read the names of over twenty saints who died in the

past year who were loved by members of our church. We have candles that you can light in the memory of a loved one.

But All Saints Sunday is also a joyful day, and one of the very best days of the year for baptism. I'm thrilled and honored that we have baptisms today. I hope that by sharing a bit about what these baptisms and the parents of these new saints mean to me, you will get a taste of that joy, and remember your own baptism, and the baptisms of those you loved. I hope that we will all feel enveloped by the great cloud of witnesses today, and that in seeing these two babies robed in white, we will connect a bit with the Revelation reading of the saints in white.