

Sermon, St. David's Episcopal Church, All Saints Sunday, Isaiah 25:6-9, 11/7/2021 (*Elizabeth Felicetti*)

Our Old Testament reading this morning is sometimes read at funerals, and it is one of my favorite funeral readings. We read it at my father's funeral in 2015. I thought of him with rich food and well-aged wines, because he and my mom threw a lot of parties when they were the age that I am now, and with their combined families, the simplest get-togethers became parties because there were so many of us. The only thing that didn't quite fit about this reading and my father was that he favored cheap wine, especially two-buck chuck from Trader Joe's (which I think is now three-buck chuck). We kids would bring wine to their party so we could have something decent to drink and always suggested opening what we gave them so we could have that instead of the boxed stuff. So the "well-aged wines strained clear" of Isaiah was a stretch. Still, maybe in the afterlife Dad could develop a taste for expensive alcohol.

I love thinking about my father today on All Saints' Sunday, when we take time to remember all of the saints: the ones who exemplify virtuous and godly living and have their own days in our church calendar, the ones we love who have died; and remember, we who have been baptized are also now saints, even though we may not think of ourselves in that way. Together we strive toward saintly living. I know I fall horribly short. How about you all?

As Christian saints we are also called to live with our end in mind. Passages like this morning's Old Testament reading assure us that after death, we will feast and be in the presence of God, and that God will swallow up death forever. In our Gospel reading today, Lazarus being raised is not simply the story of one family's tragedy, but a larger sign of Christ defeating death. We know that death does not have the final say.

Still. On All Saints' Sunday, we remember our loved ones who have died. We miss them. I pray the names of the ones who have died in the last year. They make me so sad: Kennie, who loved this church and paid to have this window cleaned, so that I think of him every time I see the vivid colors shining through. Ed Hines, who wept each year remembering the anniversary of his beloved wife's death, and who sounded like Burl Ives when he spoke. Clay, who wrote me such comforting words about cancer when he was dealing with his own dire diagnosis. Ray Nelson, who was a supply priest here when I had my breast cancer surgery, to whom I performed last rites shortly after I came back to church following my months away on disability. Fletcher Lowe, who supplied here many times, including when I had to run off with little notice five years ago when my mother was fading fast, and who refused to be paid for that time.

Those are just a few of the names I will read today. We know that they are with God now, that the Lord has wiped away the tears from their eyes.

But we sometimes fail to grasp that our own time is also limited. I know that I still struggle with this after two cancer diagnoses. Some saints, like Jerome, apparently kept skulls on their desk to remind them of their own mortality. I bought a rosary with beads that are carved in the shape of skulls with the idea that it would similarly help me remember my own death, but now I don't even really see it when I sit at my desk in the early morning. Even as I know that as a Christian, I am called to contemplate my death, I avoid it.

Holy days like All Saints can help with this. Lighting a candle for my lost loved ones reminds me that one day I will join them, and that if I am lucky, someday someone I leave behind will light a candle for me.

As you remember saints in your lives today, think about what they have passed on to you. What you long to emulate. I'm glad that my father didn't care that his kids were embarrassed by his taste in wine. I am glad that he embraced our teasing. I want to make my friends and family feel as loved as he made me feel.

What about you? What do you want to leave behind?

I keep a photo on my desk here at work that was taken just a few months ago of me reading with my great-niece Alice, who is three. I did not know that my sister was taking the photo, so I am not looking at the camera. I am wholly absorbed in what we are doing, and I love my smile, because it's not a camera smile: it's pure joy, because I was thrilled to be with this child I had not seen for a year and a half due to the pandemic. I am holding a book and Alice is manipulating one of the pop ups in the book. When I think of All Saints as a bridge between the saints who still live and those who are now with Christ, I hope after I am gone, that Alice remembers that her Aunt Biz loved books and thought reading to her was the highest honor of all. I look at her little body sitting up straight and confident, and I hope that I leave her with the knowledge that she is loved and that women can lead. She is wearing a tutu and her feet are bare, and I have on faded pants with a frayed hem, and I hope that she decides she can wear whatever she wants whenever she wants, even if it's pajamas in the airport or muddy boots to church.

Most of all, I hope she knows that her great aunt baptized her into the church and did all in her power to support Alice in her life in Christ.

Who do you remember on this All Saints Sunday? Who do you hope will remember you on such Sundays in the future, and what lessons do you want to leave them?