

Today we celebrate two of the holiest days in the year. First, All Saints Day, which traditionally is to be celebrated on November 1st but which we observe on the first Sunday of November. The other is Extra Hour of Sleep Sunday, though when it's dark at 5 o'clock today I'm going to need someone to remind me to be grateful for that extra hour. As these occasions are human inventions, I can't say that there is a deep cosmic meaning to them falling on the same day, but it did strike me as thematically appropriate coincidence. All Saints Day is, in a sense, a collective funeral for our community. And although some of those who died this year reached a good old age, and for others death ended their suffering from illness, how often have we said that we'd give anything for one more (good) hour with those we love, even if we knew that extra hour was only a brief stay against the inevitable darkness of death and the grave?

We often read part of today's gospel story at funerals, because in addition to the promise of the resurrection, it is such an honest portrayal of human grief. Mary and Martha both speak to Jesus with that longing for what might have been: *Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died...* We know, even better than the sisters, how true this is. They may have thought that word about Lazarus had taken too long to reach Jesus, that he was too far away, or that he was otherwise prevented from reaching Bethany in time. We who have read the rest of the story know that Jesus delayed on purpose, that he planned to arrive after Lazarus died. Then there would be no speculation that Lazarus had merely been in a deep sleep, that Jesus only saved him from a *near* death experience, or that his spirit still lingered, as was believed to happen for awhile after death. By the time Jesus arrives, as the King James Version puts it, "he stinketh" because he had been dead for four days. Jesus does more than revive the sick; he raises the dead, a sign that foreshadows his own death and resurrection.

Even though Jesus knew what he was going to do, even though Jesus waited on purpose before traveling to Bethany, he still wept at the graveside with Lazarus' family, friends, and neighbors. Since John doesn't tell us explicitly, we don't know for certain *why* Jesus wept, a fair question considering Jesus knows that in mere moments, Lazarus would be alive again. But we might as well ask ourselves, when we attend a funeral and proclaim the resurrection and hear the words of Revelation promising that death, mourning, crying, and pain will be no more, why do we still weep? I can't tell you why Jesus wept. But I can tell you that when someone *I*

love dies, I weep because I miss them and the future I won't be able to share with them. And sometimes for the past—for the things I should have said but never did. I weep for the emptiness that they leave in the lives of those left behind. And, if they're relatively young, for the injustice of the years they didn't get. I weep for their struggle, because death is often preceded by pain and indignity. And, honestly, for myself, because one day, I won't be the one up here in the pulpit but the one whose dust is being returned to dust.

Lazarus' community weeps for him and for each other; and Jesus weeps with them in their grief. In a few moments, we'll light candles for those in our church and extended family who have died since last All Saints Day, and we'll see that it is not a small number of our community we've grieved together this year. We celebrate their joining the church triumphant, their welcome to the heavenly banqueting table, their resurrection to life in the unending light of Christ in whom there is no shadow. Yet, as important as it is for us to gather in the hope of the resurrection, it is maybe even more helpful that we come together to support and sustain one another in this life, where we continue to face loss and pain and grief and struggle. So, not constrained by time or space as we understand it, Jesus promises both to feast in heaven with our departed loved ones and to be the food that strengthens us for the rest of our journey here.

Lazarus got a second lease on life, but that time was still limited, and he was still subject to everything that makes this life a challenge: illness, injury, injustice, all manner of brokenness that we still find in our fallen world, and still, eventually, death. But I wonder if he didn't have a different outlook, having seen what was to come, and having once been saved from the ultimate enemy. Jesus says, *Unbind him, and let him go...* I wonder where he went and what he did with his freedom before dying a second time. We who have been drowned in the waters of baptism and revived by the breath of God are in a similar situation. We still have to navigate this world and all the obstacles in it, but we have been given a foretaste of the feast to come, and we know that death, though an enemy, is a defeated one. Therefore it is not in fear but in bold hope that we live on borrowed time until we are reunited with the saints who have gone before us, on whose witness the foundation of our own faith is built. So, accompanied by Jesus and unbound by sin and death, where are we going to go in this life until we are gathered home?