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All Saints' Episcopal Church
Pentecost 21: All Saints'/All Souls
November 6, 2022

Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18
Ps 149
Ephesians 1:11-23;
Luke 6:20-31

Welcome to our 'patronal festival'! Many churches who are named after some particular saint celebrate with a patronal festival. We are named after all of the saints, so this is our particular celebration. All Saints Day, Nov. 1, is followed by All Souls Day of course, something that in Mexico and Latin America they celebrate elaborately as 'the Day of the Dead'. All Saints celebrates the great luminaries of our faith, and All Souls remembers all the faithful departed.

Today in the Prayers of the People we will pause at a certain point and say some names out loud of those who we have loved and see no longer, but who are alive in that heavenly realm. And borrowing from a Latin American custom for All Soul's Day—after each name we will say "present" to signify that they are still with us, only separated by the veil between this world and the next, and especially around the altar at Communion. I encourage you to speak the names of your loved ones.

Yesterday a number of us went down to Concord for the annual Diocesan Convention Eucharist, and the special guest was our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry. It was an electrifying Eucharist, especially hearing from him as the preacher for the service. If you saw the royal wedding where he preached, you know what I'm talking about. I would have sent out the link to the sermon on the diocesan YouTube channel last night, but I figured I'd pale in comparison this morning, so I held off.! But you really ought to listen to it! We celebrated All Saints' at the Convention too, and Bishop Curry did a wonderful job of reminding us of the Communion of Saints and the promise that we, too, shall overcome all our challenges some day! I hope I can do something similar with the rest of my homily.

Now what of our readings this morning? Let me first give you some background on the Book of Daniel. The Book of Daniel was probably written somewhere early in the 2nd century B.C.—sometime in the reign of the Selucid King, Antiochus Epiphanes (IV). After Alexander the Great, a Greek, conquered most of the known world, he died in Babylon in 323 B.C. Yes, this is the Babylon we've been hearing about for a number of weeks when Jerusalem was conquered by

Nebuchadnezzar early in the 6th century B.C. , and took most of the Jews into captivity. It wasn't but a few Babylonian kings after Nebuchadnezzar that Alexander defeated the Babylonian empire. During the time from Alexander forward there was a vast spreading of Greek thought and culture. Greek became the *lingua franca* of the world and many people adopted Greek ways—known to us as Hellenism, from the Greek word 'Hellen', meaning 'a Greek'.

So many Jews around the empire of Alexander spoke Greek that one of the great codifications of the Hebrew books of the Bible was made in Greek, which is called the Septuagint (purportedly because 70 rabbis, ergo 'sept', were engaged in the translation from Hebrew to Greek). And Greek thought and culture still held sway in the time of the Roman empire, and of course our New Testament was written in a form of Greek.

After Alexander died his empire was divided 4 ways by his lieutenants. The most important ones for our story are Ptolemy who took Egypt, and the Selucids who took most of Asia Minor down to Palestine; but Palestine, was a small border province between these two kingdoms and was fought over just like in the days of the Assyrians and the Egypt of the earlier Pharaohs. The Selucids and the Ptolemies continued to fight over Palestine. Eventually it settled to the Selucids and at the time of the writing of Daniel, it was Antiochus Epiphanes (IV) of the Selucid line who reigned.

For several centuries the faithful Jews who had returned from Babylon had reestablished their culture and religion in Palestine, but the impact of Hellenism was making inroads and Antiochus Epiphanes was determined that all of his subjects be united in culture and religion. Eventually, to spite the rebellious Jews, he ordered the sacrifice of swine on Jewish altars, and forbid Jews from observing their Law, their holy days and festivals, and even forbid circumcision of males. Women who were caught with a circumcised male child were put to death and their child hung around their neck. There were still those who resisted and this led to the Maccabean revolt that, for a time was successful. Their story was recorded in the intertestamental literature (what we refer to as the Apocrypha) of I and II Maccabees.

This was the backdrop for the writing of Daniel. But the author was clever because he told stories critical of the rulers that were set in the Babylonian Captivity period (four centuries earlier), but which were really talking about his contemporary time. He placed the stories four centuries earlier so that, as we would say today, there was 'plausible deniability' if someone accused him of criticism of the king. The first 6 chapters of the book of Daniel were these stories and the last 6 chapter were visions/dreams. In the first six chapters is where we hear the well-known story of Daniel in the lion's den. This was a story of a faithful Jew who did not follow the

foreign kings proclamation, and ended up condemned to the lions' den.....only the lions didn't comply as God shut up their mouths!

Though the stories and visions of Daniel were placed in another time, the point was for his own time as a word of encouragement to Jews who were under persecution. Daniel's fantastical visions, the last half of the book, is to the Old Testament what the Book of Revelation is to the New Testament. Both are highly symbolical. After coffee hour next Sunday, Fred is going to continue his review of the New Testament and next week it is all about the book of Revelation. For the writer of Daniel, this was a way of saying things in code essentially to give heart to the Jews who still followed their ways and would not yield to the forced Hellenism of Antiochus.

This portion of Daniel is the only portion of the book that is read in the 3 year Revised Common Lectionary for Sundays and holy days, with the exception of a couple of alternate readings in year B. We have it for All Saints because of the last line about the 'holy ones of the most high'. It seems rather tangential to pull in this reading with some obtuse reference to 'holy ones' for All Saints', but here is what we can take from this. The people of God throughout all ages have been subject to vile, ruthless, and corrupt and flawed rulers, but we look to the promises of God and know, just as the author Daniel knew, that in the end, the 'holy ones' of God who follow faithfully will have their day—'shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever and ever.'

Paul's echoes this in the portion we read from his letter to the Ephesians. When you read Paul's letters you regularly come across the run-on sentences that are inspiring and forceful, but a grammar teacher's nightmare. You can almost hear him breathlessly speaking here:

"I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power." !

When Paul wrote this, the early followers of Jesus had begun to be persecuted, and ostracized like in the time of Daniel. Here he breathes hope into the young followers with this mystical exhortation. He longs for them to have the assurance amidst everything, that the eyes of their hearts would be open to see the wonder, power, and majesty of God—in spite of whatever circumstances they find themselves in.

And what can Jesus tell us about this blessed state? We hear in Luke's gospel a variation of Matthew's 'sermon on the mount', but here it is referred to as his 'sermon on the plain', since that is where Luke situates it. Luke's version not only has 4 'blesseds', but also has 4 'woes'. It is clear in this juxtaposition that Jesus has a preference for the poor, oppressed, hungry; and a warning to the rich, the sated, those who are laughing now, and those who are lauded and praised. And then he goes on with the hard gospel ethic about loving your enemies, turning the other cheek, giving the coat and shirt off your back, and being generous to the core!

Yesterday, Bishop Curry praised our own Bishop, who, when in the house of bishops meeting before the Lambeth Conference this last summer of all the bishops of the Anglican Communion, and while they were discussing the dissension that would be at Lambeth over the acceptance of gay people, our bishop encouraged the whole house of bishops to find a way to stand up for what they believed, while still maintaining the ability to humbly kneel at the feet of those who disagree to honor them as children of God too.

In our time of great division, the incessant evil of conspiracy theories, where truth seems to be in a topsy-turvy Alice in Wonderland world, the economic challenges, the war in Ukraine, the threats of climate change, we need these lessons of hope, of love, and generosity. We need to get over our own preoccupation with outrage and dig deep into hope, love, and generosity. Someday all this trouble will pass and we will need this reservoir to draw on, if not even now! When Paul waxes poetically about having our eyes opened to the wonder and glory of God and what are the riches of God's glorious inheritance, I hope you understand that he is talking about a depth of spiritual awakening to the Christ who is with us and in us and, as he says, "...the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all." ! Do you know this in your bones—that we are the fullness of Christ in the world?.....may the eyes of your heart be enlightened!

Toward the end of his address yesterday, Bishop Curry reminded us of the old civil rights anthem 'We shall overcome', and placed it strongly in the legacy of all the saints and what they have passed on to us. They are there with us, the great saints of the church, and our own loved ones, cheering us on; and in spite of all the challenges of the current day, I do know that 'deep in my heart, I do believe, that we shall overcome some day!'