

## The Last Word

All Saints B  
John 11:32-44  
Rev. 21:1-6a

### Slide: All Saints

What can we say about this day in the life of the church? It is a day to celebrate the lives of the saints. Who are the saints? You, me, all the baptized, those who are confident in the life God grants through Jesus Christ. The saints are believe it or not, all of us. Anyone living a life faith or anyone who has lived a life a faith, living or dead, these are saints of God.

Yet, while as today is a day to celebrate all the saints, I have a feeling that what this day is tends to be mostly about for all of us here today, especially after hearing the names at the start of worship, is that this day has a special remembrance of those who have died, those we loved, those we honored, those who are no longer with us. We give thanks for all the saints who have gone to the banquet ahead of us.

### Slide: Lakeview Cemetery

The last month alone, we have planned eight funerals here at St. John's. A few of them were graveside committals. Others were memorial services at funeral homes, and some were here at St. John's. This day is not be a "happy" day for some of you. Some of you will feel your loss more keenly today. Some others will have thoughtful memories of people who died some time ago.

Perhaps, some of you will even find joy in this day and indeed find this day to be celebratory in your memory of others. But, I'm going to guess that for many of you today, the loss of loved ones will be felt acutely. I know this because Pastor Julie and I have seen eight deaths come to this community in just the last five weeks. We know that there is a pall among us even today.

So, I am just going to put what I have to say today bluntly: **Death is the enemy.** What I mean is that death is not necessarily our enemy, but it is clearly the enemy of God.

## **Slide: Cemetery**

Now, we can attempt to soften this a bit with platitudes. We can exclaim how better off the person will be now that they have gone. We can look to Heaven and ignore the important living we have been given for now and here. We can deny death, refusing to let it interrupt our lives even though it does. I have even heard of people referring to death as it is a friend, somehow softening what it really is.

And, we can convince ourselves that death is simply a part of life, a part that we all must endure. After all, it is the natural order of things. It simply is the reality. And yet, none of these ways of being surrounding death will stop it from being God's enemy, for dying and death are the true enemies of God and death was never God's intention for us in the first place. All of creation called in to being longs for that to be true.

That is why it is important for God to have the last word over death. That is why for the sake of our loved

ones who have died and for ourselves, who will die, that God battles this great enemy, an enemy of which we ultimately have no control, an enemy that is far too big for anyone but the creator of all things to destroy.

## **Slide: He was greatly...**

Listen again to the words of John's Gospel:

**"When Jesus saw (Mary) weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep."**

The friend named Lazarus had died and Jesus feels the full depth and breadth of death's power. Jesus perhaps weeps in loving Lazarus; Jesus perhaps weeps in loving Mary and Martha, who are in grief; but perhaps Jesus also weeps knowing full well that even he will have to fully succumb to death's power on a cross. Here in this story, it

seems that death wins the ultimate victory.

Yet, in the original Greek language of this Gospel of John, we get a bit more of a hint as to what Jesus is really feeling. Hear these words again in English:

**“When Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.”**

Jesus was deeply moved. The verb in the Greek here is *Embrimaomai*, which has a stronger power than simply the verb “move” or “to be moved.” This word in Greek actually is closer to: incensed, indignant, scolding. Jesus is indignant over the power of his real enemy: death.

**Slide: Lazarus Come Out**

It is in this experience that the full weight of the Good News of Jesus Christ is tested: Jesus stands at a dark tomb, the stench in the air, the weeping of friends, the Jewish authorities standing by to kill him, and with a voice of anger, power

and being incensed he yells “Lazarus, come out!”

When Lazarus stumbles out of the tomb, we truly see who has the last word. Then, as if Christ had already destroyed death even before his crucifixion, he says: “Unbind him, and let him go. Unbind him, and let him go.”

Yes, on All Saints, this day, we remember those loved ones who have been laid in a dark tomb, just like Lazarus. We know the acute grief of Mary, Martha, and Jesus, and the reality of death that simply is.

We also know about the little deaths that occur in our lives: A broken marriage; A failure at work; A starving, poverty-stricken world that is around us; A world at war against people and against creation. A world where people can't listen to each other across the aisle, deeply divided, deeply entrenched. And like Lazarus, we are bound tightly in death's clothes of grief, distress and disappointment.

**Slide: Unbind him**

Yet, Jesus will not allow his powerful enemy the win. He has the last word for us. Jesus speaks this word still today: "Unbind them, and let them go." This promise is bursting with the joy of the resurrection even before the resurrection happens. This word is spoken by the one who became human and was put in a tomb, but broke through the pervasive stench of his enemy, that of death.

And, in the waters of baptism, in these waters found in the font, we hear our God speak this word for us: "Unbind them, and let them go." Lifting us out of the waters, God frees us from the binding rags of death, and like all the saints before us, dresses us in the white royal clothing that is Christ.

And, at the table, this feast that shows that the enemy known as death cannot have the final word, we feast with the God who swallows up death forever with his body and blood, knowing that it is a foretaste of the feast that will be at the final coming of Christ.

The last word is not death, but it is life as a freed child of God.

As the book of Revelation declares: **"See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he 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."**

**Slide: God wipes away tears**

Even though death is the real enemy, we know that Christ has the last word, a word to unbind us from the ultimate power of sin and death. It is a word for our living. It is a word for our dying. It is a word great enough to defeat the most powerful enemy of all time.

Thanks be to God.