SERMON NOTES — November 3, 2024
All Saints Sunday

Common thread in today's readings:

- "Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces" (Isa 25:8).
- "God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes" (Rev. 21:3b-4a).
- "Jesus began to weep" (John 11:35).

God is with us at our times of grief and loss. Thought: compare this view of a loving God with that of a God who punishes some for an eternity in hell. Are these two pictures of God compatible? Do these two gods square with Gospel-writer John who summarizes the Christian message: "that God is light and in God there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5).

Another common thread in today's: God is also with us to lead us into a new reality:

- Jesus shows us the loving God's power of life in the face of death by raising Lazarus from the dead and unbinding us from the fear of death.
- God through Isaiah prophesies of a time when God's people will no longer bear the shame of being oppressed people in other people's empires.
- John portrays the grandest vision of all, nothing less than a new heaven and a new earth, a new Holy City open to everyone, where the Tree of Life gives healing to the broken nations.

The question is always whether we can see this new way forward.

First, do we understand that the New Creation means, in essence, a *new God*? That human beings created false gods in their own image to justify our own ways of ruling over one another and constantly warring with one another. And so the Bible is the story of the true God leading us away from those false gods to fully understanding that the power of creation is the power of love. That the Bible tells the long, long journey of human beings being stuck in the old way, stuck with the old gods who do things like punishing enemies for an eternity; and at the same time, the story of the true God promising to journey with us (covenant!) To ever invite us to the new way. New Creation means meeting God anew.

Second, do we understand that accepting God's invitation into the New Creation, also means embracing a *new way of being human*, the Way of caring for the each other and the creation? The Way of mutual service. Today, we might say: the Way of being "All Saints."

What does it mean to say that we are all saints? Proposition: that we all are created as having equal value to God our creator. God did *not* create people with unequal value. God did not create some with more power and wealth in order to rule over those of lesser means. God did not create a good, favored people to eradicate other peoples who are God's enemies. That's the false god of our own making. We meet the true God in Jesus the Messiah, who came as a lord and master who serves. Who came to endure our typical kind of punishment on the cross, rather than to dish it out. Whom God raised from the dead in order that we might see anew the new Way to live as human beings. It is an invitation to the way of forgiveness and mutual service among equals, in place of the old way based on retribution and servitude between unequals. That's what I think proclaiming and celebrating "All Saints" means. It means choosing God's new way of being human over the old way.

What are examples of living into the new reality of "All Saints"?

First: I truly believe that the *American experiment with democracy* represents something truly new in his regard. It begins with the Principle, "All people are created equal." We all have equal value in a self-governance of equal citizens. No one is born to rule over others. We elect one another to lead for prescribed segments of time. Everyone is equal under the law. We've never quite lived up to ideal of the Principle, but we've continued to inch closer.

The timing of understanding "All Saints" with the election in two days I believe to be crucial. Will we take big steps backwards into the old of ways some ruling over others? Or can we continue to take small steps forward toward the reality of "All Citizens"? Where we guard each others rights and opportunities to help each other flourish?

Second: what we celebrate on All Saints is our acceptance of God's new way to live in *church communities* where we live into the way of mutually serving one another, truly regarding everyone as created of equal value to God. We already do this in so many ways! We are being invited to extend it by going through the process of Reconciling in Christ. All are invited to a special event this Saturday: "We Love All 2024." Celebrating All Saints means that We Love All.