

Pastor Keith E. Wiens
Text: Revelation 21:1-6

November 1, 2009
All Saints Day

LIFE GOES ON

Do you remember the first funeral you ever attended?

One of the first I remember was for my Uncle Earl. He was a farmer in western Kansas. He died very suddenly of a heart attack. None of the churches in the small town of Copeland were large enough, so the funeral was held in the school gymnasium. On the day of the funeral my parents, my younger brother and I made the trip of 80 miles or so. I remember looking around the gym and seeing all the people and I remember how sad we all were.

My uncle was very young when he died and he left four young children. I was very close to his oldest son. We loved to play together. We played hide and seek and baseball and we rode horses together. And I remember being afraid that we wouldn't be able to play together any more.

I remember singing the hymn "Abide With Me." As we sang the third verse, I felt a shadow of gloom descending on that day. "Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day; earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away; change and decay in all around I see; O thou who changest not, abide with me."

On that day I was not sure that life would go on.

But life does go on! This is one of the lessons All Saints Day teaches us. As we sang at the beginning of the service, "But then there breaks a yet more glorious day; the saints triumphant rise in bright array; the King of glory passes on his way."

We are all like Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha. Sooner or later, we breathe our last and go to the grave. But then Jesus passes our way, calls our name, and says, "Come out!" And like Lazarus we come out of the grave, alive and well. Life goes on!

We come out of the grave and find ourselves in the holy city, the new Jerusalem, and we are there, with all the people of God, surrounding the throne of God. And we hear a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; 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." (Revelation 21:2-3)

In the Apostles Creed we say we believe in "the Communion of Saints." That's us. That's all of us. Those of us who are still alive. And those who have died. Those in heaven. And those on earth. One great communion of saints. One great family of God.

When I get to Heaven, I want to see my family and my friends. I want to see all of you. And I want to see those who are no longer with us in this world. Folks like my sister and my grandparents and Carol's parents and brothers.

Folks like Martin Luther King Jr., who gave a powerful witness in working for justice. Folks like Mother Teresa who was a living example of caring for the least of these. Folks like St. Francis who taught us to care for the whole creation. Folks like the Amish in Pennsylvania who lost children in a school shooting and who show us that it is possible to forgive those who have cause almost unbearable harm or loss.

Folks like Ralph Turnquist and Ed Leschber and Evelyn Holt and Florence Carlson and Eva Specht and Stubby Thorson and Robert Nelson and Vera Thorburn and Carmen Kirk, folks who have enriched our lives in this congregation in so many ways.

The Communion of Saints includes all who lived and died believing in the Lord. Who are the saints? You need not look further than this place. Saints include the likes of you and me - sinners redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ - unholy people made holy by being connected in Baptism to the Holy One who went to the cross for us.

Saint-making is God's doing. It is not something we can do. Today we rejoice that God is at work, giving life to his people, life that continues beyond the grave. We rejoice with those who have gone before us, and we rejoice with new saints, washed and made holy in the waters of Baptism, like Gracyn and Gracie who will be baptized today.

You and I are still living the life of faith. We don't yet have our golden crowns. We are not yet part of that heavenly crowd. But we are on the way. And the Lord is helping us. He calls us to the Table, to feed our faith and strengthen us for our work. It is here, as we come to our common meal, eating the bread and drinking from the cup, that we experience most fully the communion of saints. It is here, as we receive our Lord's Body and Blood, that we are made one with all the people of God, those we see and those we don't. It is here, feasting on the food that our Lord has prepared, that we get a foretaste of the great feast to come.

The Lord lifts us up and carries us along. From the waters of Baptism, to the Great Supper, through the grave, to the holy city. The Lord Jesus carries us to God. With the cross he used to conquer death and give us life, the Lord carries us, so that life may go on. And so we sing:

Neither life nor death shall ever
from the Lord his children sever;
unto them his grace he showeth,
and their sorrows all he knoweth.

Though he giveth or he taketh,
God his children ne'er forsaketh,
his the loving purpose solely,
to preserve them pure and holy.