

The Rev. Amanda Eiman  
All Saints  
November 5, 2017

When I was 17 years old, I experienced one of the first significant losses of my life. A good friend of mine, Scott, died from aggressive stomach cancer. I don't remember Scott ever really professing any kind of religion. He wasn't a strong believer nor did he really identify as Christian.

But one day, a few years after his death, on a late June evening, I was driving home from my summer job in my car. It was [around 8:30](#) at night, when the sky is still light and the air just feels magical with early summer breeze and sweetness. I wasn't thinking about Scott at all, at that point, it had been a few years since his death... But all of a sudden, as I was driving, for some reason I felt strange. I still can't accurately describe what I felt but the closest I can say is that it suddenly felt as if the air pressure changed around my body, and perhaps throughout the car. I suddenly was struck with a bit of panic because the feeling was so surreal...and I remember tugging on the seat belt, touching the gear shift and the car door...all in an effort to ground myself in reality, in this physical world.

And then Scott's favorite song came on the radio. And I smiled. I was calm. Something happened in that moment that was beyond my understanding. And that something communicated to that there was more to this life, and after this life, than we know now.

We hear one description of this fuller life in the reading from Revelation this morning – the image of that “great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.....  
they worship God day and night . They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them,  
nor any scorching heat;  
for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd,  
and he will guide them to springs of the water of life,  
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

We hear this description today because today is All Saints Day - the

day when we commemorate all of those, who, having professed faith in the living Christ in days past, have entered into the nearer presence of God. We remember saints like David, the Welsh Bishop for whom our church is named, and those like St. John the Baptist, Saint Mary, Saint Francis. But we also remember the saints that each of **us** has known in *our* lives - our family members, friends, people who have been saints to *us* and are no longer with us in this life.

So, our liturgy today began with the reading of the necrology - the list of names of people from our parish who have died this past year. These are the people who have touched our lives, those whom **we** have loved and lost.

And when we heard these names read out loud, I suspect that each of us had a reaction – maybe the reaction was one of hope and joy because of the Christian promise of eternal life in the fuller presence of God. And we give thanks that the people on that list are now experiencing that fuller life. Or maybe your reaction to hearing the names was one of sadness because someone on that list was a dear

loved one and you are mourning their absence in your life.

Or maybe the list reminds us of another loss we have experienced – the loss of *another* person dear to us, or the loss of health or independence, the loss of employment or dignity, a loss of a sense of place as we depart for a new job or home.

When we are in this mortal life, with all of its struggles and losses, challenges and predicaments, trying to imagine a future not dominated by these kinds of difficult realities seems quite impossible. But that is what we Christians are promised. We are promised that no matter what pain or loss we experience, we will be gifted with new life on the other side.

And even when we experience the loss of life itself, we will rise again, and our rising will be more than we can ask or imagine. This is the Christian promise.

And “Promises are amazing in that they don’t just *describe* things, they have the capacity actually to *create* the reality they name. Promises come as a word beyond us and set things in motion.”

(David Lose).

So this rising, this new life, is not just reserved for us after we die, but because the promise is set in motion now, new life and new beginnings are gifted to us now. So when we get to the end of the year, we can look forward to a new one ahead. When darkness falls, Christ gives us opportunity for light. When we make a mistake and need to start over, Christ gives us the chance.

So that even what seems like most final of all endings - when we come to the end of our mortal lives, our death is not the end.

Now, how this all happens is still a mystery to us mere mortals, for the most part at least. But what we do know is that after Jesus experienced one of the darkest, cruelest, most final endings of all, after he was laid in that tomb....despite all logic, despite all attempts to explain it three days later that tomb was empty. He conquered death when it threatened to be the most powerful force in history.

And as a result, you and I and all of God's people, - the saints of the Church and the saints of our lives, and all of those blessed saints

whose names were read on that list this morning, as Revelation tells us, will hunger and thirst no more, experience no scorching heat, nor hunger nor tears. We are and will be gifted abundantly with springs of the water of life, with God as our shepherd.

So death - death of any kind - is not the end, for us or any of God's people.

And that is why on this All Saints Sunday and every Sunday we remember "the whole *family* of God, the living and the dead, those whom we love, and those whom we hurt, who are bound together in Christ by sacrament, prayer, and praise." (BCP pg. 862)

We are still connected and in communion with those who have gone before. We may not see them like we once did, but they are with us – specially in times of worship, of breaking bread, and in prayer, as that vision from Revelation tells us.

But they are also with us in times of love, and marriage, in moments of joy... They are with us in new beginnings and births in endings and

in despair....Our saints are with us....in one holy communion... which is comforted, filled, and blessed by Christ.

Rev. Louis Tucker, a priest who served St. James Church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana tells a story about this communion of saints as it is called. He "was accustomed to having the service of Evensong every [Sunday evening](#). It had, however, become a discouraging experience because after a while only a few people came...he longed for greater participation...So one night before the service began, he knelt and said a prayer that he might somehow get through the service again, that there would be some sign of hope and meaning in it all. As he knelt in the chancel, his eyes opened to an amazing sight. The church was full! The pews were all occupied. So great was the overflow that persons were standing about the nave. Then he became aware that they were angelic beings. He pinched himself to make sure he was not dreaming. At the altar there was also a presence upon which he did not feel worthy to fix his gaze. Not only were all of these beings there but they took part in the service, making strong responses. Somehow he knew that the few who were present from the parish could not see or hear them. But his

simple prayer had been answered in a remarkably profound way.

Thus, in the worship of the gathered church, we are surrounded by far more than pews, and walls, and people. We are in the presence of angels and archangels and all the company of heaven.

This is a promise made to all members of Christ's body. That we all live in his household together, though some reside in other parts of the house where we are yet to visit. <sup>2</sup>

It is into this household - into this vast mystical communion - that God welcomes and baptizes every Christian. It is into this household and communion that we welcome and baptize Graham and Andrew this morning.

We and these soon to be new Christians dwell in this household together, in the one Body of Christ.

One day, whether in this Kingdom or the next, we all will be in a place where "every tear will be wiped from our eyes, death will be no more, mourning and crying and pain will be no more." (Rev. 21) but only life, everlasting.

This is our promise and our hope. This life is not all there is. "We will see one another again. You and I are called to remember this hope. And by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, we can make it known to others. So spread it, spread the life and the promise to all those who so desperately need it. Because this hope is a gift....just like all the saints, who, from their labors, rest" (Wolfe, Dean, sermon 11/1/2011).

Amen.