

Sermon All Saints Sunday -November 3, 2024, John 11:32-44
Emmanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church, Lancaster, Pa.
Rev. Timothy W. Sadler

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Mary, Martha and their brother Lazarus were friends of Jesus. We get the impression from Scripture that with them, Jesus found both friendship and refreshment.

But in spite of this close relationship, the death of Lazarus caused Mary to doubt Jesus' good intentions for them. She couldn't help but feel that Jesus had somehow failed them.

After all, they had sent word of Lazarus' illness, but Jesus hadn't rushed right over. By the time He got there, Lazarus had been dead four days. "Lord," Mary said to Jesus, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Every person alive could probably relate in some way to that remark.

"Lord, if you have been here, I wouldn't have lost my spouse."

"Lord, if you had been with me, my child would still be with me.

"Lord, if you had been with me, I wouldn't have been molested as a vulnerable child."

"And Lord if you were here with me now, I wouldn't be this hurt, this angry or this helpless."

When we feel God is removed from our suffering, we can become very angry. We might not believe God causes our suffering, but we do wonder if our suffering means anything at all to God; else, how could God let us go through what we do?

When life brings us to this place of loneliness and doubt, maybe it would help us to remember Jesus standing at the grave of Lazarus and weeping, even though Jesus knew that Lazarus would soon live again.

I think Jesus is mourning the fact that loss even exists; that in this life we can't escape losing the people and things we love. I think in this moment, when Jesus was deeply moved by the grieving of those around Him...

It would've been very hard for Him not to ask God to wave a magic wand and remove loss and suffering from this life.

Jesus could've called on a legion of angels to save Him from the crucifixion had He chosen. But Jesus recognized that all these experiences we find so hard to bear, are actually some of the most meaningful moments of our lives.

These hard moments are our teachers, but it's difficult to see that when we're in the middle of them. It often isn't until we gain some distance from our suffering that we begin to realize all it has taught us, and how much we've grown.

So rather than remove all suffering, Jesus showed us that our suffering touches the very heart of God.

One of the most powerful experiences of suffering happens when we lose someone we love. This isn't something we can make better; we can't call our loved one back into this life. Even Lazarus would die again...Mary and Martha would have to mourn.

So, God, through Jesus, has given us this tremendous gift of knowing we don't make this particular journey alone. We've been set among God's people of every time and place, among those who have died and... among those who still live with us.

This is a shared journey, and that makes even our most challenging times a little more bearable. We know that others have experienced what we have, and that the human story is our story, and the history of God's people...is our history.

I don't know how many of you have seen the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C., but it's stunning in its simplicity. Row and row, names of people who died. So many names, so many losses.

Yet as we kneel to look at all those names, we can see our own faces reflected in the polished granite.

We are there, looking at ourselves, our own reflection, our own faces, with all the names of the dead.

No one walks this journey alone. On All Saints Sunday we take the time to remember this. This is a time when we celebrate and remember all the people who have been so important to us, who have gone before us, who have been named and claimed to walk this journey with us through their baptism ... and who we will see again.

As we remember their names, we see ourselves. We join the procession down through the ages; we take our places alongside them. WE focus on the saints and see our own contemporary faces reflected in their names.

This is the time when we celebrate being connected to all of life. We're not alone, our problems and struggles aren't new, our death aren't final. Jesus stands within every circumstance, breathing health and wholeness...and new life in some way.

The people stood outside the tomb, weeping because they could see only death. Jesus came as Eternal Word and life-giving Spirit and broke the power of death forever.

Let us pray:

O, most High, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. You give life to all, and when the time is right, gather us to live with you forever. Help us not to become overwhelmed with the losses we experience in life, but to trust that in eternity, you will make all things new. To you all honor and glory be given, now and forever. AMEN.

Children/Youth and Young at Heart Story
All Saints Day – Following in the Footsteps of the Faithful

Scripture: Hebrews 12:1-2

Needed: a picture of a Christian family member or friend who died (if none come to mind, find a picture depicting a favorite person from the Bible or historical Christian)

Children's Sermon

Ask, Do any of you know anyone who believed in Jesus that died? Who was it?

(Show your picture and talk briefly about the Christian who died.)

There are lots and lots of lots of Christians who have died. And they're all in Heaven right now.

The Bible talks about some of the people who believed in God and died in Hebrews 11. And right after that, it says...

(Read [Hebrews 12:1-2](#).)

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer, and perfecter of faith."

The Bible says that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. All the Christians who died are watching us. They're looking to see what we will do, and they're cheering us on as we try to live for Jesus. They know that if we believe in Jesus our whole life, we'll be like them someday. We'll die and go to Heaven too. Then, we'll watch other people just like they're watching us.

We celebrate the festival of All Saints Day today because we want to remember the example of Christians who died before us. We want to think about all the good things they did and how they lived for Jesus so that we can live for Jesus too. We follow their example so that we can be like them and go to Heaven one day. That's what All Saints Day is all about.

Closing Prayer

Father, we thank You for loving and working through the lives of all the Christians who died before us. We pray that You'll help us to be like them so that one day, we can die and go to Heaven to be with You and all the other Christians who have gone before us. In Jesus' name,
Amen.