

Sermon
All Saints' Sunday 2021
St. Andrew's, Methuen
November 7, 2021
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Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9
or Isaiah 25:6-9
Psalm 24
Revelation 21:1-6a
John 11:32-44

It's not often Scripture gets quoted in movies, but there is a powerful scene in the movie Titanic when the bow heads down, the stern of the doomed ship slowly lifts into the air and everyone is seeking higher ground, and a man reads from his Bible the passage we heard this morning:

"I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and **the sea was no more.**"

In the ancient world the sea is a powerful symbol of the chaos of life, the chaos that gives cancer to children, Alzheimer's to grown-ups, and pandemics to the world, the chaos that we can't control.

But in the Biblical vision there is a Day coming when God will assert authority over Chaos and bring healing to the world and all that are in it.

John the Seer goes on to say, "I saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God..."

"See, the home of God is among mortals.

God will dwell with them as their God;
they will be God's peoples,
and God himself will be with them"

Notice that in this Cosmic Vision **we are not floating up to be with God in heaven** but God is coming down to dwell with us on earth.

Jesus' opening announcement in the Gospel of Mark is "The kingdom of God is arriving, change your worldview, and believe the good news."

He teaches his disciples to pray "thy kingdom come, thy will be done **ON EARTH**, as it is in heaven."

Things in heaven are just fine; it is life on earth that needs sorting out. Jesus says, "It is not the well that need a doctor, I have come to seek and save the sick."

Jesus sees what John sees: See, the home of God is among mortals.

God is dwelling with them as their God;
they are God's peoples,
and God himself is with them"

The question on this All Saints' Sunday is **how well do we see this Vision?**

We would agree with Saint Paul: "For now we see in a mirror, dimly...Now I know only in part...."

Saint Augustine, no stranger to sin and suffering said in the 5th century: "**The whole purpose of life is to restore to health the eye of the heart whereby God may be seen.**"

In the New Testament the saints are all those filled with the Spirit of Christ, but in our day we think of saints as those who live their lives as little Christs, as conduits of God's healing, so others can share the Vision of God dwelling among us all.

In this time of pandemic, I think of the Martyrs of Memphis who we celebrate every September 8th—

In 1878 Yellow Fever once again hit Memphis so hard that 5000 people left the city on the banks of the Mississippi and fled to higher, drier ground. But some, including doctors, nurses, and nuns, Episcopal and Roman Catholic, and many lay people, **stayed to tend to the sick who flocked to Saint Mary's Episcopal Cathedral.**

Thirty-eight of these saints, little Christs, died tending to the sick.

You know, don't you, that we already have the resources and the know-how to provide clean water, nourishing food, and healing medicines to most everyone in the world?

What we don't have are enough people whose imaginations have been set on fire by this Vision of God to make it a reality.

When we reach a critical mass of those who see the vision of God dwelling among us there will be the second coming of Christ.

Then Isaiah's Vision will come true:

"They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they

train for war anymore” and therefore the defense budgets of all the nations can be used to heal the world.

But here’s the thing: We have to **want** to have the eyes of our hearts healed so we can see the Vision and live as little Christs.

We just sang that that is precisely what we want today:

“They lived not only in ages past;
there are hundreds of thousands still;
the world is bright with the joyous saints
who love to do Jesus’ will....

and I mean to be one too.”

You and I use most of our energy every day protecting ourselves from those people and things that we imagine threaten us.

We are like the Starship Enterprise that has a deflector shield to protect itself from the photon torpedoes of its enemies. Keeping up the deflector shield requires a ton of energy and when the shield is up, the crew are unable to transport people to the ship.

You can have the shield up or you can bring people up, **but you can’t do both at the same time.**

So, in one episode Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock are in great distress on the planet surface, but Scotty can’t beam them up as long as the deflector shield is up.

Therefore, we have a choice in every moment—Shields up or shields down; hearts closed or **hearts open to Holy Communion?**

The saints are those who believe in the power of God in Christ to heal their eyes to see the Vision of God dwelling with us.

You and I, flawed and broken in countless ways, are those who pray, “I believe Lord, help my unbelief.”

Jesus stands, even now, calling our dead imaginations out of the tomb of disbelief and saying, “Unbind them, and let them go.”

I suspect this is what happens to those musicians on the deck of the Titanic who are playing “Nearer my God to thee” as the ship goes down.

“The world is bright with the joyous saints
who love to do Jesus’ will....

and I mean to be one too.”