

Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, November 3, 2024

“Allhallowtide”

Young at Heart Message

Today is the Sunday in many churches across the globe when Christians celebrate All Saints' or All Souls' Day.

It is also the time when people from across faith traditions celebrate and honour their loved ones who have moved on from this life to the next.

I wanted to better understand the significance of this day, so I did a little research that I'd like to share with you all today.

Some of you may already know much of this, but some of it was new to me, so I thought I would pass it along to you.

Let's start by talking briefly about Allhallowtide.

Allhallowtide is the three-day celebration that includes all the various customs (both obsolete and still observed) of Hallowe'en, All Saints', and All Souls' Days.

Generally speaking, it is considered a time to remember the dead, including martyrs, saints, and all faithfully departed Christians.

The first day of Allhallowtide is All Hallows' Eve and it falls on October 31st – of course, it's known more commonly as Hallowe'en. It is also known as the Eve of All Hallows or the Eve of All Saints' Day.

The word “hallow,” by the way, is synonymous with “saint” or “holy person.”

Traditionally, it was believed that the souls of the departed wandered the earth until All Saints' Day, and All Hallows Eve provided one last chance for the dead to gain vengeance on their enemies before moving to the next world.

In order to avoid being recognized by any soul that might be seeking vengeance, people would wear masks or costumes to disguise their identities.

Today, children (and adults!) perpetuate this custom by dressing in costumes and going door to door to collect candy and treats.

While our current Hallowe'en customs do not necessarily reflect the spiritual significance of the evening, it was also historically a time when some believed that the veil between the material world and the afterlife thinned.

If any of you have ever seen the Disney movie Coco, it represents a good example of cultures that still believe this thin veil exists and that those who have gone before us seek our help in getting peace in the afterlife.



The second day of Allhallowtide is called All Saints' Day, and it falls on November 1st.

This is a day that some Christian traditions honour all the saints and martyrs – both known and unknown.

It seeks in particular to honour the blessed who have not been canonized and have no special feast day in the Catholic Church.

The third and final day of Allhallowtide is All Souls' Day and it falls on November 2nd.

This day commemorates all the faithful departed.

Many Christian traditions today, including our own, tend to combine All Saints' and All Souls' Day into one celebration to honour those who have gone before us and to acknowledge the impact our ancestors have had on our lives.

If you have not already noticed, today we are doing exactly that and are focusing our worship on honouring our ancestors along with those faithfully departed souls who have been associated with Good Shepherd or who have had an impact on our own faith journeys.

In other words, today we honour the saints in our own lives who have helped us become the people we are today, and who have impacted our faith and our relationship to the church.

The Message

It is curious, then, that the lectionary chooses the passage from the Gospel of John in which Jesus resurrects Lazarus to commemorate All Saints' Day.

Nothing like causing those of us who have lost loved ones to wonder why Jesus couldn't also raise our loved ones from death! Or, at the very least, it might cause us to wonder why Jesus couldn't have healed our loved ones so they didn't die.

This passage about Lazarus is interesting because it only appears in the Gospel of John, and Lazarus isn't mentioned again after Jesus resurrects him.

So, we don't actually get to know what happened to Lazarus after this scene.

Some traditions do make claims that he becomes a Bishop, but there is no agreement on that, and there is definitely no mention of him again in the Bible.

So, we are left hanging with regard to what happened to Lazarus after he was resurrected.

However, I suspect that we don't hear about Lazarus again because what happens to him after the resurrection is not the important part of this passage.

In fact, I am not even sure the resurrection is the most important part of this passage, believe it or not, at least with regard to the celebration of All Saints' Day.

For those of us who have lost loved ones very close to us, I think the hope in this passage is actually Jesus' reaction to the situation.

It is not realistic for any of the characters in the Bible to expect Jesus to resurrect all of their loved ones (in fact, most of the characters in *this* passage are confused or even scared, and even Lazarus seems a little confused about what happened).

If resurrection (or prevention of death) was something Jesus promised to everyone, it would have happened a lot more frequently in the Biblical accounts of his life.

Instead, I think the reason this passage is in here is to demonstrate that Jesus experiences grief much like we do when a loved one is lost.

Not only does Jesus experience grief, but he walks alongside us as we experience grief and he weeps along with us.

Jesus may have had the power to save Lazarus, but he does not, in part because he cannot possibly save everyone.

The world is too big and there are too many people in need for Jesus to conceivably be able to save everyone.

Not only that, but logistically, the world would be a very different place if everyone just got to live forever or was cured whenever they asked for it.

This passage, instead, is meant to demonstrate that when we weep, Jesus weeps too.

When we grieve, Jesus grieves, too.

Jesus does not leave us in our moments of grief and loss, nor does he cause death, pain, or grief.

Instead, Jesus joins us in our grief and loss. He sits next to us, wraps his arms around us and wraps us in love and tender care.

He weeps alongside us and never once leaves us in our time of despair.

It may feel to us sometimes like God causes our pain, at the very least because our prayers for God to cure or heal a loved one cannot always be answered.

But Jesus shows us in this passage that pain and grief is bound to happen, and when it does, he is right there with us.

This passage is offered to us on All Saints' Day because it is a reminder that in Jesus we find hope and we find rest.

We find a God who shares in our grief, our pain, and our sorrow. A God who wraps us in loving arms as we experience the pain of memories of our loved ones.

This Sunday we celebrate, we grieve, we mourn, and we experience the profound love of God as we remember those we have loved and lost.

In our grief, we find hope in a God who loves us so deeply that they would send Jesus to walk with us in our pain and to experience that pain right along with us.

In that hope, and with all our love, we honour and celebrate the people we love who have gone before us and paved the way.

May we celebrate and honour them today by lighting candles in memory of our loved ones, and then by receiving God's grace through the sacrament of Holy Communion.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Since we are going to be remembering the souls of the departed in just a moment, I want to offer a prayer to help us prepare our hearts for this time of remembering. Let us pray:

I give you this one thought to keep.
I'm with you still.
I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow.
I am the diamond glints on snow.
I am the sunlight on ripened grain.
I am the gentle autumn rain.
When you awaken in the morning hush,
I am the swift uplifting rush.
Of quiet birds in circled flight.
I am the soft stars that shine at night.
Do not think of me as gone
I am with you still at each new dawn.
Do not stand at my grave and weep
I am not there. I do not sleep.
Do not stand there at my grave and cry.
I am not there. I did not die.

Amen.