

Call to Worship

Isaiah 25:6-10a

On this mountain, the LORD of heavenly forces will prepare for all peoples a rich feast, a feast of choice wines, of select foods rich in flavor, of choice wines well refined. He will swallow up on this mountain the veil that is veiling all peoples, the shroud enshrouding all nations.

He will swallow up death forever. The LORD God will wipe tears from every face; he will remove his people's disgrace from off the whole earth, for the LORD has spoken. They will say on that day, "Look! This is our God, for whom we have waited— and he has saved us!

This is the LORD, for whom we have waited; let's be glad and rejoice in his salvation!" The LORD's hand will indeed rest on this mountain.

Prayer of Invocation

Jesus Christ, you know before we speak, that as individuals and a fellowship we have had to say farewell too often. **As we gather today to worship you, we humbly request that you strengthen our memories of those who have inspired us, challenged us, lifted us up, bore us in their arms, taught us the gospel, broke bread with us, and served with us in the great mission of your kingdom. On this All Saints Day may we celebrate, with hope and a few tears, the lives from which we have been separated, but which we shall be reunited again someday. These things we pray in your great name. Amen**

*The Word

Revelation 21:1-5 (Common English Bible)

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

I heard a loud voice from the throne say, "Look! God's dwelling is here with humankind. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. There will be no mourning, crying, or pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Then the one seated on the throne said, "Look! I'm making all things new." He also said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

Living the Word

My Uncle John, who is 8 years older than me, was much like an older brother as we grew up on the same farm. A few years ago, in September, for my birthday, my dear Uncle John found several pictures of me around age 5 to share with the world on Face-book. The pictures came from an album he received when my Grandma Nana died twenty five years ago. I asked to borrow the book so we could all enjoy this family treasure.

It was lots of fun, and one whole section was 8x10 photographs of the building that is now the Bakken Young Funeral Home in River Falls. The pictures were from 1958, when that building was being built as the 'New First Covenant Church.' In one of the pictures my grandfather, Newton Pearson was helping put the wood flooring down in the Sanctuary.

Newton was a dairy farmer, one of the original directors of the River Falls State Bank and a deacon in his church. He was someone who was committed to his family, his community and his church. Life in those days was family, community and church. He is one of the saints of my life, along with Grandma Nana and now both of my parents who have passed on from this life.

Every year on all Saints day, I remember them along with others, and their commitment to God through the church. There is a great cloud of witnesses that have influenced who we are. I invite you to take a moment now in silent prayer and make a mental list of the saints in your life...

Many committed Christians have come before us, whatever church we grew up in. Two thousand years of the church. From the beginning, there have been many struggles, many splits, but the church as a whole has remained because of the saints, the committed Christians, who continued to follow the teachings of Jesus.

The Church is not going to end in our lifetimes, but we can keep it strong by doing the one thing that Christ emphasized: "Loving One Another." We begin by continuing to teach the stories so that the next generations can know who Christ is and what he came for.

We will all pass on some day, but while we still have breathe the church still needs committed folks; committed to family, community and church; to pray for each other, to come together 'with and for' each other, to share our gifts, to work together and to tell others about the good news of Jesus Christ and the church; a place where we can be a part of the hub of ministries where we are actively serving others.

Did you notice that both of the scriptures spoke of Jesus wiping away every tear. It doesn't say that Jesus stopped the tears – until he comes again – it says in both scriptures, that he wiped the tears away. In this human life we will have tears.

Sometimes they come in torrents, sometimes with sobs, sometimes just falling one at a time. They are never convenient and often not predictable. I have told many people in my time as a pastor that there is no right or wrong way to grieve a loss. You can't make grief happen when you want and you can't stop it when it comes. Yet God uses tears to help heal us both physically and spiritually.

God also knows our pain and grieves with us. Jesus then comes to wipe up the tears as we grieve with God. For all of the saints who have died, there is no more pain and no more tears. We should always be able to find support through the church. Sometimes we are called to be Jesus with a hanky for someone else.

On my wedding day, which was not a day of grieving, I was already over tired as the day began and when the time came for my dad to walk me down the aisle, the excitement caused me to burst into tears. My poor dad, can you imagine, the music had started and I was sobbing. He firmly took my arm and said to me - "Buck up girl." My father's strength and encouragement helped me, and somehow, I pulled myself together for the ceremony.

Sometimes we can do that...sometimes we just can't. Yet Jesus is there for us in some form, if we can focus through the tears and turn toward him. That is why we serve and receive Holy Communion – to remember to keep turning toward Christ. And after we have experienced that compassion and love, we can turn toward someone else and be for them 'Jesus with a hanky.'

How many times in TV shows or movies have we seen someone crying – stereotypically, the female – and the person, usually the strong male with them, pulls out a hanky. It is taken and the eyes are dabbed as the hanky owner /supporter smiles sympathetically. Then the hanky is moved to the nose and the owner looks on in horror as the hanky becomes covered with stuff other than tears.

Often we are called upon to listen and wipe some tears, but there is risk in offering the hanky. It brings us further into a relationship as we now have to deal with the stuff that is more than we planned for. To be Jesus with a hanky means risking beyond the tears. It means offering to help another carry their baggage of hurt and grief, and in the healing to feel their blessings, all the way to heaven.

Isaiah gives us these words: *"On this mountain, the Lord of heavenly forces will prepare for all the people a rich feast...and choice wines."* Today is a time to remember the saints, to remember Christ and then to move on with our lives until the time when we are with them. Isaiah was a prophet and saw and wrote enough of the future to recognize that this life was not the end for us and that God would continue to invite us to the feast. He predicted the feast and the one to come, a Savior.

We are here also today to celebrate who we are together, how we can make a difference for others because of the one who came to teach and redeem us and so we can give that good news to others. We await a new heaven and a new earth, but each day is a part of that newness.

God does dwell with us and we are God's people. Jesus still is here to wipe away our tears. The former things: former times, former issues, former problems, have all gone away at some point and time has renewed everything around us. The feast we still share, begs us to remember, knowing that it is bitter sweet to remember those who are now gone.

Yet through Jesus we can also recognize that we have all been moved and changed because of the presence of those saints in our lives. They have helped form who we are and will always be a part of us in some way.

Then we have to move forward with who we have become and all that God has before us. It is a time to commit our new selves through the church to the family, the community and the church. So, as the earth revolves it becomes new once again.

There is now a new, new First Covenant Church in River Falls, because the old, new First Covenant Church grew too small for its ministries. Part of my family is still committed to ministry there.

My parents and grandparents: I remember each of them every year on All Saints Day. So we pause this morning to light a candle, possibly with a tear or two, as we remember those who have made us who we are today.

And then we will share a feast, the sacrament of Holy Communion, to remember Christ, who is with us to wipe away our tears, and then we need to step forward, committed in ministry to be there for others and also for the future of the church. How do we begin a new chapter, building on the story of our past, but beginning to create a new future?

Well, we are not done 'thinking greater,' but for today it is time to remember, celebrate with a Holy feast and then we will move on together. *"We're marching to Zion, beautiful, beautiful Zion. We're marching upward to Zion the beautiful City of God."*