

Hayward United Methodist Church

Pastor Samuel's Message for the Twenty-Second Sunday After Pentecost, November 7, 2021

"I am the Resurrection and the Life"

Text: John 11:17-27

Gospel Reading: John 11:23-27 (NRSV)

Jesus said to Martha, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection of the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of the God, the one coming into the world."

Prayer for Illumination (UMH 6)

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that, as the Scriptures are read and your word proclaimed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

In the church's liturgical calendar, November 1st is celebrated as All Saints Day and the first Sunday in November is celebrated as All Saints Sunday. The church started celebrating All Saints in the fourth century CE. Initially it was primarily for those who faced death through martyrdom. They specially dedicated a day in a year to remember their faith and commitment to Christ. Since the sixteenth century onwards, all believers were included in the celebration. The church remembered the extra-ordinary service of all Christians and gave thanks to God for the lives well lived.

In the Apostles' Creed, the church confesses "the Communion of Saints." The word, "saint" comes from the Greek word, "*hagios*" which means "set apart." Back then those who believed in Christ were set apart for a specific purpose to do the will of God. In that context all believers were called "saints." The apostle Paul calls all believers saints when he writes to the church in Corinth: "Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, To the church of God that in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus,

called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours” (1 Cor 1:1-2). It shows that early on the Christian believers were called saints. The church began to call some extraordinary people as saints, such as Saint Peter, Saint Paul, Saint Mother Theresa, and so on. Basically the saints are simply ordinary people, like the believers in the church in Corinth. They were called into the fellowship of Christ. All Saints Sunday reminds us of our communion with saints, the ordinary saints in our lives. As we read together the passage from John’s Gospel we are reminded of comfort and hope that Jesus offers in difficult times and our common bond with one another.

First, the love of Jesus was shown. The story of the raising of Lazarus is very a very familiar story. Most of us heard about it in Sunday school. Other times it is read on special occasions like memorial services. Although the story may look so familiar, John writes in cryptic language. That means we need to look at the story deeply. Jesus had three close friends, Marth, Mary, and Lazarus. Of course, Jesus had the twelve disciples as well. The raising of Lazarus is found only in John’s Gospel and it is presented in a dramatic way. John has allocated the entire chapter and it has got fifty seven verses. It’s one of the longest chapters in John and it is one of the longest stories as well.

Jesus loved Marth, Mary, and Lazarus. That is why when Lazarus was ill, they sent a word to Jesus to come and heal him. Probably Jesus was in their home many times. Marth, Mary, and Lazarus listened to Jesus’s teachings in public. They had a special bond. Jesus was more like a friend to them. They could count on Jesus when they needed him. They wanted Jesus to come right away to their home so that Jesus could heal their brother of sickness. By the time Jesus arrived, Lazarus was dead for four days and buried. Nevertheless Jesus came and determined to help this family.

When Jesus went to the tomb, he wept. This is the only place in the entire New Testament we read that Jesus wept. When others saw Jesus weeping, they said, “See how much he loved him” (John 11:36). Others could see the love of Jesus for the family. Whom do we turn to when we face difficulty situations in life such as this? We do turn to friends and relatives. Friends and relatives come to help us. They understand our situations. They come to offer prayers and comfort. They are our saints. We can count on them in times of crises. Sometimes even strangers

come to help us or people whom we did not see for long time were there for us to help and offer support.

The story of Lazarus speaks to the reality of life. Death is real. No one is exempt from it. Many came to console Martha and Mary as soon as they heard of Lazarus's death. Jesus too came to console them. When the disciples were grieving over Jesus's death, Jesus came and presented himself alive to console them. Jesus promised that he will be with us always. Jesus brought God's presence to the family of Lazarus. Jesus continues to bring comfort to all those who suffer the loss of their loved ones. We have a Savior who himself suffered on the cross and was raised back to life. His invisible presence brings peace that passes all understanding. We can count on the love of God through Jesus Christ as much as we count on the love of our family and friends. We have saints on earth who bring the love of God into our lives.

Second, there is always life to look forward. Jesus through the resurrection of Lazarus demonstrated that there will be life after death and there will be future resurrection. Although Lazarus was raised back to life, he died sometime later. He did not live forever. Jesus brought back Lazarus to show that he has power to raise the dead. Jesus will have the same power to raise all those who died in the Lord. Because he is the resurrection and life. Jesus speaks here as if he himself was raised back to life. Only after raising Lazarus, Jesus will go to Jerusalem to face death and then he would be raised back to life. Jesus represents the very life of God. So he continues to live with God even before and after his death.

Jesus made one of the important statements in the Gospel. He said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25-26). Here Jesus speaks from two perspectives. Jesus does not deny the reality of death. He himself would face death soon. Probably by this time he lost his father. From human point of view, one has to pass from death to life. But death is not an end. It is a way to new life. There is life beyond the grave. It is life not in terms of coming back to earth alive, but it is to live with God after death. Lazarus' resurrection show that Jesus had the power to bring back the dead. If one believes in Jesus, they continue to live beyond grave with God in new life.

What about those who live and believe in Jesus? Will they be alive forever more? Again, Jesus speaks from the view point of God. From the view point of God there is always life even before death and after death. God sent Jesus to give eternal life. Those who believed in Jesus have already received eternal life. They live their life with God here and now and they will continue to live their life with God after death. The life they received from Christ Jesus continues beyond the grave. For God there is always life, not death. Because God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

Jesus asks the same question he asked Martha back then. He asks, “Do you believe this?” Martha expressed her faith in the Lord of Resurrection and Life. She believed that Jesus had the power to raise the dead back to life all the time. Because the life Jesus gives lives forever. When we put our trust in Jesus, Jesus promises eternal life. He raises us back to new life here and now. And in the future he promises bodily resurrection. Here is hope we can stand on. Here is hope that can lead us to glorious life, life in the Son of God.

We can celebrate the lives of our loved ones. They are saints in heaven. We can thank God for the examples they left behind. Also we can thank God for saints here on earth. They are there to help us in this journey of faith. They are there with us to show God’s love so that we can be encouraged to look forward to a glorious future. The apostle Paul says, “I consider that the present sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18). God has prepared a glorious future for us. God promises to be with us in our sufferings here and now. God will offer God’s life through Jesus Christ to live with God forever. God Bless.

Pastor Samuel

**Let’s say the Benediction together:
The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with us all. Amen.**