

Maybe you know the song the title of which I've used for my sermon title this Sunday, "Tears in Heaven." Eric Clapton wrote it after the unimaginably tragic death of his 4-year-old son. The song begins with these lines. . .

Would you know my name
If I saw you in heaven?
Would it be the same
If I saw you in heaven?
I must be strong and carry on . . .

The words tug at our hearts, and I'm sure we all can relate to missing loved ones, missing those with whom we still really can't imagine living life without. And yet we have no choice in the matter, and we are forced to carry on without them.

Like the title of Clapton's song, Tears in Heaven, this year's All Saints readings reference tears more than other All Saints readings. Isaiah and Revelation look forward to the day when God will wipe away all tears.

And in our Gospel reading from John, we see the weeping of all who mourn the death of Jesus's friend, Lazarus.

You can almost hear Mary's voice crack when she says to Jesus,
who tarried several days
before making his way to the home of Mary and Lazarus,
"Lord if you had been here, my brother would not be dead."

And, Jesus himself feels that same grief as he talks to Mary and agonizes over the loss of his friend, Lazarus. Verse 33 gives a moving description of Jesus who "was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved."

These words sound strong, and we hear them as Jesus being moved with sorry and compassion. However, theologian Ginger Barfield points out that the English translation of these two verbs is too weak, saying that

“The first verb has a connection to anger. It is not simply a strong feeling, but it is more of a passion and pain that comes from anger at the situation.” (also used in v. 38).

[Likewise,] the root of the second verb is tied to a “stirring up of oneself on the insides.” The stirring can have a physical sense, like stirring up water but “In a more personal sense, it signifies both mental and internal disturbance that is akin to almost being physically sickened and disturbed.”

It is probably more accurate to say that “Jesus was angry.”

But what, exactly, is Jesus angry at? Is Jesus angry at Mary, for her lack of faith? Angry at the group described as “the Jews” for their unbelief? If Jesus is angry at them, is he not also angry at death itself?

Then, following this description Jesus’s anger comes the shortest verse of the Bible, verse 35: **Jesus weeps**. Jesus has the same reaction that the mourners do, the same reaction we do when we mourn — he cries, maybe even ugly cries, real tears.

Jesus, God with us, knew the pain of loss. In a bit, as we read the names,
and as the bell rings,
and we feel our losses,
we know Jesus knows what the void feels like too.

Then, through his anger and his tears, Jesus tells Lazarus to “Come out.” And Lazarus does. Smelly, still bandaged up in grave clothes, likely completely unaware of what just happened to him, staggering into the light. But there he is. He was dead, now he is alive.

I think it’s interesting to note that out of the 14 verses in this story about the “raising of Lazarus from the dead,” 12 verses focus on the grief and the loss, and only two verses on Lazarus being raised back to life.

And even those two verses make it sound somewhat unappealing as we envision a bound-up Lazarus who already has a foul odor. We don't get the description of what we would imagine in terms of the happiness, the elation, the hugs, and tears of joy. Yes, Lazarus has come back to life, but it's all rather muted, subdued, and strange.

It's where we live, isn't it? That there is more grief and struggle than joy at resurrection and restoration. And even when there is resurrection and restoration, it's not as dazzling and overwhelming as we might hope. Like a smelly and bound-up Lazarus stumbling out of a tomb, into the bright light of day because we still live in a broken "not yet" healed world.

There is an election this Tuesday. Maybe you've heard this. It's not my job, nor can I, tell you how to vote. But I can encourage you to keep in mind

your faith,

and your commitment to the Kingdom of God

and the work God calls us to do

for God's shalom,

for the peace and justice that God desires.

The care of the outsider, the poor, and our neighbor in need.

And I can remind you that we come here each Sunday to remind ourselves of our ultimate loyalty, which is to God, and not any political party. We are Christ followers first, and Democrats, or Republicans, or Independents, second.

And our ultimate loyalty SHOULD inform any other loyalties, political or otherwise.

You may have heard the statement that "Religion and Politics don't mix." But, saying religion and politics don't mix, IS a political statement!

Likely if someone doesn't think about the intersection of religion and politics, they are either a religious person who shies away from politics, or a political person who doesn't want religion making any demands on their political agenda.

So we think politically from a faith perspective,
carefully, and prayerfully.

This past week, Bishop Lull preached at a Synod gathering of the St Paul Area Synod and the Minneapolis Area Synod, and she said this,

“No matter who is elected president of this country, we have much reparative work to do. We have work to do to rebuild the fabric of trust between communities, including ones we belong to that are fractured, and disillusioned angry and fearful and that work falls to everyone of us.”

And maybe that's the connection for us this All Saints Sunday, two days before Election Tuesday. In our temporal world, there is much anxiety and fear. But our faith reminds us that we have an eternal perspective,

That God is in control,
That God calls us to be faithfully
That God calls us to love our neighbor

All Saints Day reminds us, compels us even, to keep eternity in focus. The day to day, the ups and downs of life, the trials and tribulations, joys and sorrows, and even consequential events, like elections, when viewed from God's perspective, are temporary.

But God's love for the world, *God's care for the living and dead is eternal.*

So let us remember on this All Saints Day Jesus' words in John 11:25, they are the hope of the gospel that we proclaim today: “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.”

Back to Eric Clapton's lame for his son. The song closes with these words:

Time can bring you down, time can bend your knees
Time can break your heart, have you begging please, begging please
Beyond the door there's peace I'm sure
And I know there'll be no more tears in heaven

That's the hope we live with, in the words of our text from Isaiah:
Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces,

And from Revelation:

See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them and be their God;

4 he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

This is our eternal hope.

Thanks be to God. Amen.