

## All Saints Meditation

John 11:32-44

The story of the raising of Lazarus includes a definite miraculous element, something none of us ever expects to witness or be part of, and something that many of us may have trouble even relating to. The rest of the story, though, the part about the sickness and death of an individual and the mourning of those who were close to him, is very much a part of all of our lives.

This story in the Gospel of John is filled with raw emotion. The sisters, Mary and Martha, are not only grieving the loss their brother, as we would expect, but they are also upset. Whether we want to describe it as anger or disappointment or whatever it is, there is definitely something going on between them and Jesus, some tension. They seem not just a little put out or annoyed with him. They seem to feel that he has let them down. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

And there is weeping, which there normally is at a funeral or memorial service. Mary and Martha as well as others who have come to be with them are weeping. Even more striking, Jesus himself weeps.

This Gospel reading is one that we sometimes hear read at funeral services, often with another part of the text where Jesus says to Martha: "I am the resurrection and the life." The first reading this morning is also one that is sometimes read at funeral services. Likewise some of the music that is being used this morning is sometimes used in the context of funeral services. Many of us here attended funeral or memorial services within the last year for the people whose names we will read in a few moments. The whole tone of our service this morning is in keeping with that of a funeral service. It is somber. And it may be that at some point in the service, maybe when someone's name is being read, or when a candle is lit, or during one of the hymns, you may get a lump in the throat, or wipe away a tear. That is alright. That is quite natural. It happens at funeral services and it may happen here today.

And yet, for all of those similarities, this is not a funeral service. We are not here to bury or eulogize anyone. What we do today is different. This service represents another step on the path of grieving, an opportunity to do something more, to name loved ones and friends who have died in the last year and to remember them once more in the context of our Christian faith.

In our understanding of things, we don't do any of this to benefit the people who will be named. The truth is, they need nothing from us now. For as is says in one of the prayers in our funeral service, for them, "death is past, pain ended" and they "have now entered the joy" God has prepared. What we do here today really has more to do with our own needs -- our need for ritual, symbol, gesture; our need to remember; our need to put the death of friends and loved ones into the context of our faith. What we do here today is a way of affirming the goodness of life, affirming our love, and affirming that these whom we will name, are not forgotten.

This is a service of remembrance and celebration. We are here to remember some people by name who were and who are still very dear to us, to offer our thanks to God for their lives. We do it in the context of All Saints' Day, which is November 1<sup>st</sup> on the calendar, a day set aside by the church at large for the purpose of remembering not any one individual, but for remembering all the saints, that is, all the ones who have died in Christ.

By doing it in the context of All Saints' Day, someone might be led to think that maybe the church is trying to put one over on us. Like the little boy who went to his uncle's funeral and listened to all of the wonderful things that the minister was saying about his uncle and got out of his pew and walked up and looked in the casket to see if it was really his uncle that the minister was talking about.

That is not what we are up to. We are not implying that these good people were anything more nor anything less than human. We are not suggesting that they lived without fault, without making promises they were unable to keep, as we all do, or even without at times possibly hurting those close to them, intentionally or otherwise.

Nor are we entering into collusion with one another, agreeing to pretend for the moment that they were better than they were, or agreeing to remember only the best parts, and to forget the rest.

Like the definition of "saint" one person offered: "a dead sinner, revised and edited."  
Not at all!

What we are doing this morning is much more honest than that. The people whom we will name in a few moments were real people, and the memory of them should also be real. We want to remember them for who they were. We celebrate their lives not because they were extraordinary people necessarily, but because in some unique way, through their ordinary lives, if we were paying attention, we may have seen something of the grace of God.

We read the names of these individuals today not to unduly exalt them, and not to benefit them in any way, but as a remembrance. So let us remember them as they were, give thanks for them, celebrate their lives, and number them among the saints of God.