

Sunday after All Saints' Day  
November 3, 2019  
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC  
The Rev. Catherine Tatem

Daniel 7:1-3. 15-18   Psalm 119:49   Ephesians 1:11-23   Matthew 6:20-31

Daniel had a vision in his head, a nightmare; and, as nightmares tend to be, it was vivid, bizarre, and terrifying. In the time of King Belshazzar of Babylon, the people of Israel were terrified; they were living under oppression and in a time of national chaos in which, ultimately, the Temple would be destroyed, in 167 BC (before Christ). Our lectionary reading skips over some vivid descriptions of the beasts that Daniel saw, and we move quickly from terror to – triumph. The four beasts represent earthly powers who rise up, and yet “the holy ones of the Most High,” God’s people, will receive and possess God’s kingdom forever. Daniel is bringing us gospel – good news – who we know in the person of Jesus Christ, in his death and resurrection. God raises us up out of chaos; God’s people will forever be ... God’s people.

It is not only Daniel in a pre-Christian world who has nightmares. Our sleepless nights, troubled minds, seemingly endless tragedies, from the dying and death of loved ones, geopolitical battles well beyond our influence ... these are *our* sea of chaos from which apocalyptic visions spring. What will be our revelation?

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has already come and conquered worldly terrors. Nothing will separate us from Jesus; we have been claimed as his forever. Even the event that separates us the most, death, has been overcome by Jesus’ resurrection.

And when we come to the communion table and partake of bread and wine, we are making a radical statement: we are saying the Christ redeems us, saying “alleluia” in a world in which human powers seem to be in control. In partaking of bread and wine, transformed by God into the real presence of Christ, we are declaring that we follow Jesus, and that in him, the Christ, we are one. And, since nothing separates us from God, we are joined with all the saints: deceased, alive, and yet to come. These are the saints we commemorate today: all of the children of God, all of God’s creation, and we both mourn their death and praise their resurrection. Christ’s light will not be extinguished.

Psalm 149 is today’s response to the writings of Daniel, and the first message is “alleluia!” Praise the Lord! This is a laudatory psalm, praising God even while our double-edged swords hold us in the balance between a violent world and a

triumphant God. We *will* be caught in the fray while we live this life; we face violence of word and deed. But we are not alone. We are imperfect saints of God; God's children and creation. A friend once said: "What a joy it is to spend our lives giving God's love away," which is our call as living saints of the kingdom. Does that love ever lessen? No. We who worry about having enough and being enough are transformed by the love of God to know that God works "even" through "the likes of us."

A miracle of All Saints' Day is that God is still at work in us. Ordinary people, we who are both saints and sinners, convey God's love. We receive God's love, too, and often at unexpected times and in unexpected places. When has that happened for you? (pause) Celebrate that today. Honor the God moments, the times this week or this year or in this life that you felt closest to Christ. Who are the saints who came to you?

In the burial liturgy we commend ourselves to God, asking God to take us into God's enfold:

Into your hands, O merciful Savior, we commend your servant *N*.  
Acknowledge, we humbly beseech you, a sheep of your own fold, a lamb of your own flock, a sinner of your own redeeming.

Ordinary sinners, ordinary saints, all within God's embrace.

The miracle of God's ongoing work through us and the assurance that God will always love us falls flat in the beatitudes, today's reading from the gospel of Luke. Four blessings and four woes line up with one another ... and convict us.

Blessed are the poor and woe to the rich;  
Blessed are the hungry and woe to the full;  
Blessed are those who weep now; woe to those who laugh now;  
Blessed are those who are hated, and woe to those who are lauded, praised.

We are convicted by the statistics of the world: we are undoubtedly the rich and the full. Even in this country, most of us are still the rich and the full. Will God abandon us? Jesus spoke directly to his disciples, and his words applied to them: they were financially/economically poor, would face hunger, weeping and hatred by being a follower of Jesus. The disciples will also experience being rich and full; they will know joy and love.

We remember the chaos from the book of Daniel, and from the psalm, our double-edged swords next to our "alleluias." One point from this day is that nothing in this

world will save us. Violence will not save us. Taking things into our own hands will not redeem us. When we rely only on what we have, our power, our possessions, our excess – disaster follows. We are in woe, in deep misery. Think about the beloved character of Scrooge from a Charles Dickens' tale:

“Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grind- stone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner!”

If Scrooge could be transformed by looking at his whole life and have love transform him, how much more hopeful we might be! I do not know anyone who would fit into Dickens' description of Scrooge-as-sinner, but even he was changed. Even Scrooge would be called a child of God.

So it is for us; children of God, sinners and saints, part of God's ongoing creation. It is our hearts that Jesus wants, that God might show us the reality of God's kingdom here, now, and forever more.

Alleluia!