

**The Rev. Dr. Hilary B. Smith**

**Holy Comforter**

**Richmond, VA**

**November 1, 2015; All Saints Day/Sunday**

**Readings:** Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9; Psalm 24; Revelation 21:1-7a; John 11:32-44.

## **Claiming the Reality of Who We Are**

Welcome to this celebration of All Saints' Day.

We celebrate All Saints' Day every year, but usually we have to move it to the Sunday following...but this year, November 1st falls on a Sunday, which feels special to me, that we get to be together, worship God together, remember those who have gone before us into eternal life, and recommit ourselves to God, on this important feast day.

This All Saints day is also special for us because we are baptizing John; welcoming John into the fellowship of the church.

He has always been a beloved child of God, and today he becomes a member of the Body of Christ and a minister of God's reign.

A minister, you say?

That's right...and I will return to that idea, that reality, later.

This is a special day for me because I was baptized on All Saints' Day, which was also on a Sunday in 1992, so John and I will share that in common.

Our readings for today speak to us of the power of God...the power of God being the ultimate power in our lives and in all creation.

Church is a good place to be, because it is here that we are reminded of the spiritual realities of life, reminded and supported by God and community in claiming these realities for ourselves.

We receive God's power here for our lives, which can happen anywhere, God's power and grace are not limited to a place, but certainly it happens here.

God helps us to claim the reality of who we are and what life is for us.

An important reality is that we are part of something much greater than ourselves, and that we are in community, in communion, with all the saints who have lived, who live now, and who will live in the future---we are bound to each other for ever through God, who gives us life!

God has given us life, so that God may delight in us; and God will never let us go...the powers of death have no hold on us or those whom we love but see no longer.

Of course, this not a belief that all people hold.

Our reading from Wisdom states that well: *In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be a disaster, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace.*

They are at peace.

Because:

*The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them.*

During our Eucharistic Prayer today we will remember those who have died in the last year.

In remembering them, we connect with them; in living our lives now to God's glory and continuing what they started for us, be that our church, our faith, our families, or our other passions.

I value turning in my pledge card for next year on this day because doing so, when we do so, we recommit ourselves to God's mission in the world and to the work of those who provided what we now cherish, as well as providing for the saints of the future.

In supporting our shared ministry through Holy Comforter, we claim the reality that our church really matters...that it makes a difference in our lives and in the lives of those we serve in the wider

community...what we do, what God can do through us  
because we are here, transforms and saves lives.

Today, through baptism, John becomes a minister of this reality---that  
God, and we as Christ's hands and heart in the world, are about life,  
abundant life for all---through baptism we are united with Jesus  
in his mission to transform and save lives.

John will be claimed and named and marked as Christ's own forever...to  
have life through the Spirit now and forever, and to be a person of  
peace and love and justice in the world.

And then there is Lazarus!

Jesus says, "Lazarus, come out!"

And then to those standing there, stunned by what has happened, by the  
power of God in the world to transform and save a life, to them

Jesus says, "Unbind him and let him go!"

What reality does God want us to claim for ourselves when we hear the  
story of the raising of Lazarus?

You might want to pray with this story.

When has Jesus called you to come out?

And we have all been called to come out...

...to come out into the light, to come out of the past into the present, to  
come out of the whatever was keeping us bound.

For being God's companion in the world, and a friend of Jesus, means that  
we are always being called into the fullness of life.

This is the life into which we will baptize John today.

It is not always an easy life; but it is real life; it is life lived in the Spirit as we  
grow more and more into the full stature of Christ.

Sometimes we are the ones Jesus calls forth from that place of death and  
being bound.

And sometimes we are the ones to whom Jesus says, unbind him, unbind

her...let him go...let her go.

Sometimes, perhaps often, perhaps every day as the church, we are called by Jesus to help with the unbinding of others...to help others be free, free to be who they are, free to live a life that does not bind them with unjust structures.

The Episcopal Church is having a Lazarus moment today.

God is always calling us to come out of the tomb of racism; the whole human race is bound when we are not naming and challenging and dismantling racism.

John shares his baptism day with a historic life-transforming day in the Episcopal Church, because today Michael Curry is being installed as the 27th Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church...the first black person, the first person of color, to be the presiding bishop.

The service takes place today at noon, and can be watched live on the National Cathedral's website.<sup>1</sup>

The Union of Black Episcopalians held a service yesterday, a Vigil and Eucharist in honor of Bp. Curry on the Eve of his installation.<sup>2</sup>

As the preacher, the Rev. Canon Dr. Sandye A. Wilson said, Bp. Curry's installation does not change everything, but it is a great day, which calls us all to be great.

She made the point in a powerful and beautiful way that as our leader we need to pray for Bp. Curry, and not prey on him....not look to him for all the answers and then criticise him when he doesn't seem to do what we want.

What Bishop Curry brings to us as our presiding bishop is a whole lot of inspiration to do what God is calling us to do as baptized persons, as people who are part of the Jesus Movement.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cathedral.org/> and a copy of the bulletin can be found here  
<http://www.cathedral.org/pdfs/20151101PBCurryInstallation.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/vigil-celebration-and-eucharist-honor-michael-curry>

What a great day to be baptized, on the day Michael Curry becomes our presiding bishop and sets the tone for our Church, for our mission, for our ministry.

Today Jesus calls John to new life through baptism, and today Jesus calls us all to come out into more freedom for our Church and by way of us, many others are called to greater freedom.

Racism did not end in our country, as Sandye Wilson said, with the election of President Barack Obama, and it does not end today, in our country or even in our Church, but it is another step, a big step out of the tomb of racism that has keep us bound.

We look to our leaders in the Church, ordained and lay, to guide us and give us inspiration, but then it is up to everyone of us, to listen, to pray, and to discern how we are called to be and act.

God has work for each of us to do until all are unbound and allowed to go free.

Is church about being safe or is church about being bold?

It is both; through baptism today, John is safe, held in God's embrace forever, united with Jesus and with this community, in this great adventure of faith.

To show our support for John, you are invited to sign the matting that will frame his baptismal certificate.

But baptism and life as a Christian is also about being bold, bold enough to help make known God's reign by unbinding people and by allowing ourselves to be unbound.

With Michael Curry as our presiding bishop, we will be inspired to be bold, knowing that we are safe, no matter what, in God's loving embrace.

As Sandye Wilson put it in her sermon yesterday, using what has become a signature phrase of Bp. Curry, we are called to be part of the "Jesus Movement:"

*The Jesus Movement...that changes lives, upsets people in power, turns over tables and turns lives around...institution is what happens when a movement grows up...can be too predictable...we are being called forward into the Jesus Movement, turning tables upside down and turning lives around.*

This bold and secure life, one of coming out of all that binds us, and also helping God to unbind and free others, this is the life of faith, this is the life into which we have been baptized and into which we baptize John today.

I will conclude with a prayer of blessing for children and youth and our baptismal font that my small group wrote during our parish retreat last weekend:

*May God bless all children and youth. May God bless us as we seek to open a welcoming door for them, so that they feel the comfort of belonging, know the strength of faith, and revel in God's joy. May God bless our font, charging this living water with the grace and the power of your love so that all who come through these waters may be transformed and given the courage to do your work in the world. Amen.*