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Holy Comforter

Richmond, VA

November 6, 2016; All Saints' Sunday

Readings: Daniel 7:1-3; 15-18; Psalm 149; Ephesians 1:11-23; Luke 6:20-31.

The Holy Ones of God

On this Sunday before the presidential election, we are
given this beautiful, precious time together...to
focus...to consider whose we are and who we are
as members of the Body of Christ, members
of this expression of the Christian faith,
the Episcopal Church and
specifically Holy Comforter.

We are just a couple of days out from what some have
characterized as a day of apocalyptic possibility...it is
going to be the end of the world if so and so is
elected or not elected.

I was in a business last week, at the counter settling my
bill, talking with several people there about the
election.

I was saying how glad I was that it would soon be over.
And as I was ready to leave, one of the young adults
working there said, "Well if any of the polling places
are bombed or attacked, we might have martial
law..."

Hmmm.

I was pretty much ready to get out of that store.

People may talk about this election as having "end times"
significance...but no matter what happens,
God will still be God, and Holy Comforter will still be here to
manifest the signs of God's reign---peace, justice, and
love.

Voting is important; voting is a faithful thing to do.

Our presiding bishop, Michael Curry has called voting our

Christian duty...but we as the Church do not say who
to vote for...that is up to you.

Our faith in what is greater does make what is
happening now insignificant.

Somehow it has been easy to take this election and frame it
with apocalyptic language.

Interestingly, our reading from the Book of Daniel for today contains aspects of
the apocalyptic but from the faith perspective.

For a long time the people of God have been
sharing visions of what life is really about, and where
it is going, and who has the victory.

The section chosen for this All Saints' Sunday from the
Book of Daniel invites us to focus on what is meant by
the "holy ones" "the holy ones of the Most High
shall receive the kingdom and possess the
kingdom for ever --for ever and ever."

This passage of course comes from a particular time and
place in history, when the Jewish people were being
ruled by the Hellenistic tyrant Antiochus IV,
175-164 BCE. ---one of the beasts of Daniel's
vision.

There were "beasts" of the time then, just as there are
people and situations that trouble us, some more than
others.

But the holy ones of God, and they are holy, not because
they are perfect, for none are, but are the ones set
aside, called by God...to be in the world for
God...are called to be the saints of God now and forever.

On All Saints' Day, which we have transferred to this
Sunday, on this day, we remember all the saints of
God, the famous ones, and the ones known to us
from our lives, and those known to God
alone.

This day has come to take on a lot...the saints in heaven
are remembered, particularly our loved ones and

friends who have died in the last year.
 And we remember that we are God's saints too.
 We are the saints on earth.
 Just as the Jewish people are God chosen people, we too
 are chosen and united with God through Christ,
 through the sacrament of Baptism.
 Baptism this is how God brings us close and calls us to be
 God's own for the world.
 In her essay on the pastoral dimensions of this passage
 from Daniel as it relates to baptism, Pamela
 Cooper-White aptly notes:

“We do not baptize to make people pure or perfect. Baptism immerses us in the waters of life and death so that we are able to die to loneliness and alienation, to die to the need to rely only on our strength. Out of the water, we rise again to new life---a life of complexity and richness, a life of community, a life now led as a member of the body of Christ---a life of service.”¹

All people are part of the God's life...the human family...and
 we who chose to follow the Way of Jesus, become
 members of the Christian family, the faith
 community through baptism.

The Episcopal Church has a new book to help us
 remember the saints of our history - *A Great Cloud of*
 Witnesses - phrase taken from the Letter to the Hebrews - 12:1
 During General Convention last summer, when this book
 was approved for trail use, we had a lively discussion
 on the floor of the House of Deputies about who is
 in this great cloud of witnesses...can people who were not
 Christian be included?
 Well, wouldn't many of us think of Gandhi, who famously
 said that if Christians would be more like their Christ
 we would do better...Gandhi is in the cloud of
 witnesses for many of us...we could go on and on...the point being

¹ David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol., 3*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, Epub., Pamela Cooper-White, "Pastoral Perspective," Loc 8340 of 12899.

that God's love includes all...and some of us choose to
follow
the Christian path.

Through our baptisms, we become the saints of God
through Christ...by being chosen in this way to be a
minister of the Church, which means being a
seeking and doer of peace, justice, and love.

Ian and Torin who are about to be baptized, will be united
with all the saints both who have gone on to the closer
embrace of God and all the saints on earth,
through Christ.

Baptism is forever; but each day we all get to choose how
we will walk in the Way of Jesus, how we will walk in
love.

They are being baptized not to isolate them in a small group, but to
call them to be in the world for others.

In our Gospel reading for today, we hear Jesus speak of the holy ones of God.
Blessed are...blessed are you saints...you are part of
something greater in than yourself, of which we have a
sense now...and one day will experience in its
fullness.

When we were baptized, we, or our parents and
Godparents for us, promised that we would be God's
saints in the world...again, not perfect, but those
who strive for what characterizes the
kingdom...and in our striving, we are
united with Christ who makes it real
for us now.

"Blessed are who are poor, for yours *is* the kingdom of
God."

It has already happened; God's reign has come near
through Christ, and through our baptisms, our union
with God, through each of us.

We are called to live into the ways of God now, the reign of
God, the kingdom of God, as our baptismal promises
describe.

As we renew our baptismal covenant today, see what grabs
your attention and invites you into deeper reflection as
to how you are for God in the world.

What does it mean for you to continue in the apostles'
teaching and in the breaking of the bread and in the
prayers?

What does it mean for you to seek and serve Christ in all
persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

What does it mean for you to strive for justice and peace
and to respect the dignity of every human being?

And as you renew these vows, consider all of those
Christians who have gone before us, and because
they took their baptisms seriously, provided this
church for us.

They walked in love for many years --- these are their
footprints...You walk in love here now ---these are your
foot prints...and the white ones are Jesus foot
prints -- the One whose walk in love makes
all of this and us...as community...
possible.

I love turning in my pledge card on All Saints Day; I feel
and believe that we are united with all these saints
who sacrificed so that we could have a church...so
that God could have a church here at the
corner of Monument and Staples Mill.

When I put my card on the Altar, I feel surrounded by this
great cloud of witnesses, who support us and
encourage us to lay aside all that hinders us so that
we "might run with perseverance the race that is
set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer
and perfecter of our faith..."

(Heb. 12:1-2)

We make our pledge to God to support the ministries of the
church, for each other...that we are here for each
other...and for the wider world.

All Saints' Sunday is always the first Sunday of November,

and the first Sunday of every month is always our Good Samaritan Sunday, when we bring food up to the Altar for our Food Pantry visitors.

What could be a better manifestation that our pledge to support the church is also our pledge, our promise, to these people and to all those whom we serve in God's name.

All Saints' Sunday -- this day is about whose we are and who we are...

Blessed are you...we hear Jesus say.

Amen.