

## God Feels—All Saints

Click [here](#) to watch on Facebook!

[Isaiah 25:6-9](#)

[Psalm 24](#)

[Revelation 21:1-6a](#)

[John 11:32-44](#)

*Sermon delivered at Christ the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Hamden, CT*

On this special Sunday when we remember before God all those from our congregation who have died and are now in God's presence, we have very hopeful and reassuring messages and images from the Bible.

In Isaiah, the prophet sees that God will take away the veil of death. In the book of Revelation, the prophet John sees much the same thing: death will be no more in this cosmic future when God's creation is remade. Our lesson from the Gospel of John also tells us that Jesus is more powerful than both death *and* decay as he resuscitates his 4-days-dead friend, Lazarus. But the Gospel lesson is a little more realistic—a little more accurate maybe to our lives. In this story Jesus *himself* weeps.

His friends Mary and Martha are deeply grieved, having lost a brother. "When Jesus saw [Mary] weeping, and the [Judeans] who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved." And: "Jesus began to weep." Why would Jesus weep? Why, if he, himself knew and had fore ordained as the Son of God the cosmic futures of both Isaiah and Revelation? This is the very heart of our faith as Christians, **Jesus' weeping**.

Even though Isaiah and the book of Revelation show us beautiful, cosmic futures... we still dwell in a cosmic present, where people do die.

There is an important element of context from both our lessons from the Book of Revelation and from the prophet Isaiah that is left out. Folks from our Cross-Generation learning time on Sunday morning will remember: the people in the time of Isaiah were suffering—the people of God in Israel and Judah—they were afflicted so greatly, so intensely. Their nation, their religion, their culture was collapsing around them. All that they knew, all that was ever stable for them was being destroyed by foreign powers. And in the midst of this hell, the prophet Isaiah sees a vision of a future. Notice the future tense: "It *will* be said on that day, 'Lo, this is our God... This is the LORD for whom we have waited...'" At the present moment, the people are waiting, the people are yearning.

The same is true of the Book of Revelation: The author of this mysterious New Testament prophecy was an exile. And tradition says he wrote alone on an island off the coast of Turkey in the Aegean Sea. And he wrote at a time when the earliest followers of Jesus were being crushed and abused and marginalized by the Roman Empire. (If Isaiah thought the Babylonians were bad, there may never have been a more inhumane and ruthless power than the Romans.) Into this staggeringly sad present, the prophet John sees a cosmic future of hope and justice. Again, notice the future tense in the prophet's words: The voice from the throne says, "Death *will* be no more; mourning and crying and pain *will* be no more..."

But **now**, we wait. And a part of us, I know, says the same thing that the crowd said to Jesus in John's Gospel: "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Which is to say, if there is so much power in God, why do we have to go through all this?

Again, we are back at our earlier question about Jesus' weeping. Why would God cry? The point, I think, of all our lessons from Scripture this morning, is not actually that God eliminates suffering. The point, revealed in Jesus, in God being made flesh, **the point is: that God feels.**

When God is fully revealed, it is not lightning bolts and tidal waves. It is a human man, on a cross. God goes through with us. Just as Lazarus is laid low, just as Lazarus is bound with funeral cloth, just as the stone is rolled over the tomb—so Jesus died, and was buried.

God goes through with us. In the hopeful visions of the prophets Isaiah and John, what if the most important message is that **God feels**? Both lessons tell us that God will wipe away our tears. And I can say, as the father of a 1-year-old, I wipe away tears 3 or 4 times a day. And every time I do, when my daughter is crying for one reason or another, I always think of these two pieces of Scripture. How tender they are, and how real.

As a parent I can't prevent tears, I can't stop falls, I can't zap away tiredness. But I am present, I go through *with*, I wipe away tears. This is how God chooses to be with us. God, we believe, is present, is sent to us. Our God in Christ gets "greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved." And that, I think, is the veil of death that is removed, that will be removed. It is a veil of separation. The shroud that we believe somehow God is far away because of pain, because of death.

But in Christ—in our baptism into Christ—we inherit a faith that says pain is not a separation. We inherit a faith that believes God became pain for us, and is with us now and always.

Even though our appointed Psalm for this All Saints Day has its place in the very ancient worship hymnal of the Hebrew people, there is a very early Christian way of interpreting our

Psalm this morning too. And it, basically, is a reading that replaces the word "Lord" with Jesus. (It goes like this:)

Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in.

Who is the King of glory? Jesus, strong and mighty, Jesus, mighty in battle.

Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in.

And what, you might be asking, did these earliest Christians think were these "Ancient Doors," these "Gates"? These are the gates to the land of the dead. This is the proverbial stone over the tomb. And God breaks these gates of death not so that we can come out, but so that the King of glory **may come in**.

All those we love, and all those whom God loves too, will indeed rise. But the reason we know this, the reason we believe, is because Christ dies with us, God waits with us. The Ancient Door of separation is flung wide, and God has come in.

*Amen.*