

## KNOWN AND LOVED

All Saints' Day, Year B: Isaiah 25:6-9  
Psalm 24  
John 11:32-44

Rainey G. Dankel  
Trinity Church Boston  
November 4, 2018

**Key Passages:** *[Jesus] cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out! ... Unbind him and let him go."* (John 11:43, 44b)

*On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food...* (Isaiah 25:6)

Clyde Edgerton, a writer from North Carolina, tells of the time that noted evangelist Billy Graham visited the nursing home where Edgerton's elderly aunt was living. Dr. Graham moved through the halls talking with the residents and their families, offering words of comfort. He held a particularly lengthy conversation with one resident in a wheelchair in the corridor. As he prepared to move on, he leaned close to her face and said: "Do you know who I am?" "No, I don't," was the prompt reply, "but there's a nurse right down there who can help you with that."

To be known and acknowledged for who we are is a basic need. The common greeting in the Ubuntu language is not "Hello," but "I see you." Today we observe the Feast of All Saints' Day, one of the great celebrations of the church year. We gather to remember those who have lived their lives in the faith and fear of God. We honor them for their good work, their courage, and their love. As we acknowledge them, they live on in our hearts and memories.

The texts for today may be known to us mostly from their use in funerals. They are words of comfort whose familiarity at times of sorrow offer something stable, a hand reaching out to grasp ours as we struggle against waves of fear or confusion or anger. Their placement in today's service reminds us of the meanings contained here, meanings for all the times of our lives. It's the meaning we affirm every time we say a creed in which we express our faith in the communion of saints, the mystical connection we have with all those who live forever in the peace of God through Christ.

The story of the raising of Lazarus is one of the last events prior to the narratives of Jesus' death in the gospel of John. Mary and Martha are some of Jesus' closest friends. They have shared conversation and meals in their home in Bethany. So it is natural that they send an urgent message to Jesus when their brother Lazarus is gravely ill. Jesus delays coming, saying enigmatically that what is going to happen will reveal God's glory.

When Jesus arrives, he learns that Lazarus has died and been buried. Jesus is moved by the sorrows of his friends; he weeps with them and goes to the tomb. When he asks for the stone to be removed, even Martha is hesitant and in an almost comical reply, reminds Jesus of the smell. But he presses on, praying aloud for the sake of the crowd, and then calls to Lazarus. When Lazarus comes out, still wrapped in the burial cloths, Jesus turns to the family and says, “Unbind him and let him go,” (John 11:44).

Jesus stands in front of the cave and says “Lazarus, come out!” He calls his friend by name. It’s a personal call, a rescuing hand extended individually, drawing Lazarus out of the old and into the new life that only Jesus can give. In his reflection on John’s gospel, writer Reynolds Price says this story speaks the words that we all long to hear: “The Maker of all things loves and wants me,” (*Three Gospels*, p. 177).

Names matter. They acknowledge each of us in our uniqueness, and they signify our relationship with each other. In our simple use of name buttons here at Trinity, we offer a profound truth that in calling each other by name, we affirm the connection and care for each other that we have learned from Jesus. In the remembrance of All Saints, we acknowledge those individuals in whom the light of Christ has shown, whose memories guide us in the faith.

Last Friday night, many of us responded to the invitation to join the Shabbat service at Temple Israel. We at Trinity have a special connection to that community, as they opened their doors for us to hold services when we were locked out of our church following the Marathon bombing. So we came, along with people from a variety of faith communities across the City, to sing, to pray, to stand together in remembrance and resolve in the face of the slaying of eleven congregants of the Tree of Life Synagogue. The names of the eleven were recited in prayerful remembrance, and we asked for God’s comfort and healing for all who have suffered at the hands of hate.

In the midst of grief and despair, we affirmed hope and trust in the God who has promised to lead us from chaos and oppression into new life. The Holy One whose word guides us as a beacon of light, and whose love lives in our hearts as divine image. This light of hope was visible as we stood together, in the solidarity of trust in God’s providence and in the resolve to overcome hatred with the power of love.

And nowhere was that hope more visible than in the naming ceremony that took place that night. A new child was presented by her family, representing four generations of faithful people. As she was named for her great grandmother, the Rabbi told us a bit of the story of her ancestor, urging the namesake to receive the gift of the name and the story as part of the inspiration for this young life. Surely the family members will continue to tell their little one about the promise of hope that shone that night.

That light of hope shines in our service today as well. The Sacrament of Baptism draws on our Jewish heritage by including the formal naming of each child. We receive our names in Baptism, a sign that God recognizes each of us as members of the family of faith. We baptize each child using their first and middle names. It is not that the family name does not matter. Clearly it does. And we also recognize that incorporation by Baptism brings us into a broader family, the community of faith, the Body of Christ. In the waters of baptism we are buried with Christ and raised with him. We affirm that our names are inscribed in the Lamb's book of life (Revelation 21:27), as we are sealed and marked as Christ's own forever. Jesus stands at the tomb and calls us forth by name into the new life of forgiven and redeemed children of God.

Following today's sacrament of Baptism, we will gather for Eucharist and claim the promise of new life for all the redeemed. As we do at every celebration of the Lord's Supper, we come to the joyful feast promised to us in the words we heard today from the prophet Isaiah. God spreads a banquet before us, a feast of rich food and well-aged wines. We come together with our ancestors, from whom the shroud of death has been removed. Together we become part of the unending line of saints who gather around the throne of God. Their voices join with ours in endless worship in the words "Holy, holy, holy..." God wipes the tears from our faces and we find each other as beloved children of God.

One of my most prized possessions is a walnut dining table, handed down through my husband's family. It was made by his great grandfather, a cabinetmaker who emigrated from Poland to escape the seemingly endless wars there. My late husband Thaddeus was named for him. We loved gathering at that table, sharing meals with family and friends over the years. As I sit at that table now, I believe I can hear some of the voices who shared stories and fellowship through several generations. It is a link to all those lives.

And so today we come together to celebrate the lives of those who have gone before us and to welcome new members into our midst. We gather at the Lord's table to give thanks for the gift of new life promised to us in Jesus Christ. My friends, whatever tomb may close around you, whatever stench of fear may cling to you, whatever shroud of death may threaten you, it is no match for the power of the spirit of God flowing around and through you. May your remembrance this day bring you into the presence of the Communion of Saints, that mystical union of all those, past, present, and yet to come, as we join in a timeless celebration of God's never-failing love for us.

In life,  
In death,  
In life beyond death,  
We belong to the Lord.

The One who has called us by name  
Is the One who has set us free.