

Sermon for All Saints Sunday
November 6, 2022
The Rev. Canon Raymond Raney
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church
Los Alamos, New Mexico

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

To all the saints gathered here and from their homes in Northern New Mexico, grace and peace from the God who was and who is and who is to come.

All Saints is one of the seven principle in the Book of Common Prayer, and the only one that transfers to the following Sunday when it occurs during the week.

Scholars believe the celebration of All Saints began in Ireland, spread to England and then on to the continent and Rome. In the first century, the graves of Christians who were buried in Rome would be “fed” with milk and honey to sustain the departed as they waited for the resurrection.

We no longer feed the dead; though we do give children candy on All Hallow’s Eve.

We gather today to celebrate those who have gone before. As we sang in the opening hymn:

“For all the saints who from their labors rest, who thee by faith before the world confessed, thy name, O Jesus, be forever blessed. Alleluia, alleluia!”

That’s the party line for we as Christians. Chalk up the verses, there are eight of them, and they pound the drumbeat of victory over death and the grave.

Rousing as it is, when I think of all the people, friends and relatives, a different hymn comes to mind.

There are places I'll remember
All my life though some have changed
Some forever, not for better
Some have gone and some remain
All these places have their moments
With lovers and friends I still can recall
Some are dead and some are living
In my life I've loved them all

In My Life – by the Beatles – is kind of a simpler hymn for that nostalgic feeling of wishing I could visit with my friends who have gone before me.

I’ve known so many good people. I remember a few years ago I was asked to speak at the dedication of the newly renovated St. Bede’s, and I thought of those words.

I pictured the men and women I had known at St. Bede's over the years sitting on the soffits above the octagonal nave, peering down on us all as we looked up to the dove rising at the apex of the painted ceiling.

I was raised up from St. Bede's.

It was that church that completed my formation as an Episcopalian, beckoned me into lay ministry, and eventually into the ordination process.

I am the priest I am today because of the deep, theological discussions with my friends at St. Bede's. I could just see them sitting up there, looking down on us.

And I remembered the ordination service when I was made a priest.

My mother had died two months before.

Her photo was on the table with the ordination gifts.

And there I was lying prostrate on the floor during the litany of ordination, and I felt the sun beaming through the windows, warming me, and I imagined my mother's touch, blessing me.

And so Jesus tells us:

“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

“Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

“Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

“Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.”

But blessing is not the whole of the story Jesus tells.

We must remember that Jesus taught lessons that were so counter-cultural that it is difficult to imagine the world he lived in, a world in which the strong held dominion over the weak, a world in which the bumper sticker on a Roman chariot would say: “I don't get mad, I get even.”

In that world Jesus says things that are counter-intuitive, things that are not common sense, but he implores to the ears of the few – even the few today.

"But I say to you that listen,

Love your enemies,

do good to those who hate you,

bless those who curse you,

pray for those who abuse you.

If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also;

and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.

Give to everyone who begs from you;

and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.

Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

Amen.