

“No More Tears”

November 1, 2015

All Saints Day

Poems, songs, and lyrics sometimes come out of deep grief. The choir sang “Hymn of Promise” – a song written by Natalie Sleeth as she was battling cancer. Today you received a card with words from Eric Clapton who wrote the song “Tears in Heaven” in 1991 after his young son died in a tragic accident. It’s as if Clapton was taking words from Revelation: *Beyond the door/ There's peace I'm sure. / And I know there'll be no more.../ Tears in heaven.*

It’s hard to imagine an end to tears, isn’t it? We cry. We cry because we’re upset. We cry because our hearts are touched. We cry at movies. We cry at the news. We cry when we experience joy. We cry when we remember sorrow. We cry when a loved one dies. We cry.

And as we remember saints today, we cry – maybe at a specific name read, or maybe even more at the power of this day and the power of this promise from God of no more tears. God walks with us through grief. God receives us where we are and does not let us go.

Today is All Saints Day, and we hear one of the greatest and most amazing promises in all of Scripture – this vision of what will be – of what God is doing. Some call it heaven or the Kingdom of God. Someone said, “Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die.” And it’s true. All of us want to experience this vision, but we don’t want to deal with what gets us there - death.

I’ve used this passage to comfort families and loved ones, especially when a young person has died suddenly. Nothing can be said to take away the pain of losing someone so unexpectedly, but the promises in Revelation offer something beyond what we experience at this moment. There will be peace and comfort – maybe not now, but it’s a certainty - a guarantee - down the road. There’s incredible hope in the promise that God is working on something new. And this promise: no more death, no mourning or crying or pain. Can you even imagine it?

So why this intense focus something new? On hope and promises? The Book of Revelation was written during the reign of the Roman Emperor, Domitian, who was in power from 81-96 AD. During his reign, Christians were persecuted. There were internal divisions in the church mainly over false teachings. One Christian leader, whom we know as John the Seer, was sent to the island of Patmos as punishment. While he was there, he saw visions and communicated his visions with symbols as a way to ensure that other Christians could receive them.

If you read through Revelation, it's full of strange and confusing images. Different traditions have different ideas about what the symbols mean and how these visions play out in the end. But this vision of a new heaven and a new earth is powerful. John says that God will make a new place where the faithful will live and be in relationship with God like never before.

John offered his fellow followers of Jesus comfort in the midst of what they were experiencing and hope for what God was doing. One writer says that John wrote to others to control their fear, renew their commitment, and sustain their vision in a time when all anyone could see was cruelty, death, and hopelessness. Maybe we can relate. Sometimes it feels like that's where we are, but John's visions from God offered hope, and hope is a long-term motivator.

Today is about hope, too. All Saints Day began as a time to remember those who had died for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We continue with that tradition as we remember those who have died. We celebrate their faithful lives – how they loved and served God.

We have hope that they are with God. But even more, we remember them and cling to the hope of eternal life that God offers us in Jesus Christ. Hope is a gift of God and a long-term motivator to keep us going.

But hope is more than being optimistic. Hope is grounded in believing that God is Creator of the world, that God is good, and that God is at work in us and around us to bring good. God invites us to share in working for good – even when the situation seems utterly hopeless.

No disaster can take away hope that is grounded in God, and we witness great hope and love in response to human struggles. Death cannot take away hope, and when we experience the loss of a loved one, we know that our hope in God's love and comfort is stronger than death can ever be. It doesn't make it easy, but it does make a difference. Hope is stronger than fear, and fear of death is dispelled when we trust in God's gift of eternal life.

In spite of all that's happening in the world – terrorism, war, economic problems, people struggling to survive – we believe that love and grace will win every time. In spite of whatever we face today – unemployment, illness, trouble in our family or with a friend, grief – God promises something on the other side.

Even as remember saints today, still we grieve the loss of someone we love. God promises to be with us, and God promises life on the other side of grief. What seems inevitable and final is not if we're willing to listen to God and trust God.

Investing our life with God means believing in the grace that God offers through Jesus Christ and living in response to it. Living a life with God takes our trust and hope, and it's always tied to God's promise to be with us.

And hope in God doesn't always make sense. Perhaps those Christians who struggled when John sent this vision were ready to give up. Some might call it outrageous to trust God when life is at its worst. Hope in God requires that we love even when we don't want to. Hope in God requires that we live each day as if it were the last day we have. Hope in God requires that we sacrifice for the sake of others. Hope in God requires that we give up what we want and pay attention to what God wants.

God has the power and grace to change our present reality into a glorious future. After all, what is the ground of our hope? It rests with the truth that even when all hope was lost, even when Jesus had been beaten and crucified, even when he was dead and in the tomb, God raised him from the dead. The most fearful of all – death – was overcome by the power of God to make all things new.

And so, can't our God who can even raise Jesus from the dead – can't our God even bring new life and hope to the dead places in our lives? Our God can bring redemption, goodness, safety, and security. Our God can bring healing and wholeness. Our God can change hearts of people we don't believe can be changed. Our God can change us, too.

When we come to this table, we confirm our hope in God. When we take the bread and drink the cup, it's a symbolic act of hope. It's something real that we can touch and taste. It's God coming to us in grace. It's a reminder that we invest in a future with God. We join with the saints in glory at the table. We wait for the promised feast with joy. We wait for an end to tears. It will come. It is God's promises and our hope.

Thanks be to God! AMEN.