

November 4, 2018 • All Saints Sunday • Holy Communion

“The Circle”

Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris



Revelation 21:1-6a

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

Last Sunday in worship, we prayed with old Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, to be given sight and insight for the living of our days. And in the faces of the two new Christians we baptized, and the eleven new members we gratefully welcomed into membership in this congregation, in their faces we saw with our own eyes the hope and joy of the present moment that is a bright indication of our future together as we grow in love, fellowship, and service with one another in this beautiful community of faith.

This morning, we pray that God’s spirit of wisdom and revelation might open our eyes and the eyes of our hearts to see the glorious cloud of witnesses on this All Saints Sunday. Oh, we can easily look around and see the present-day saints as we worship together this morning. But I’m talking now about those who have gone on ahead, those who sat in these pews before many of us were even born, those who dreamed a church and lived lives of steady faithfulness, those who walked the path before us, those who paved the way, those who taught us by their example, and in whose debt we now live. Here we now sit, surrounded by countless generations.

I want us to see this morning the riches of God’s glorious inheritance among the saints.

Because, though they have now gone home to be with God, they are never far from us, as close to our hearts as a breath and prayer. They cheer us on, they comfort us, they reassure us. And we are rich in the inheritance of their faith and their love. They persevered in hope through the darkest times and they gave thanks to God in times of plenty, times of joy. Today we remember this special community that shapes us and nurtures and holds us accountable, this community of love in which we live, extending to all God’s people on earth and all the company of heaven.

All Saints Day has been called a day to “feast on thanksgivings of memory”. As we lift up their names, and light candles, and tie white ribbons, as we gather around this table of love to share in the sacrament of Holy Communion this morning, we will feast on thanksgivings of memory. And our hearts will fill with gratitude for the boundless love of God, encircling all time and space, holding us close, drawing us in, lifting us up, sending us out into the world God so loves.

This morning we also begin our annual reflection on our support of our congregation through, as we said last week, through our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness, with a special focus on our financial support. You’ll see the logo of this year’s campaign on the front of your Order of Worship. “Grateful” is our theme, reflecting the circles of God’s never-ending love. As we remember all that for which we are grateful, all the many gifts of God to us which come in so many ways, may we respond with humble and generous hearts.

For, in God’s love, and especially today on this day as we “feast on thanksgivings of memory,” we remember that through God’s love in us, our lives move out in concentric circles of love. From the “me” at the center, we move to the “we” of our close family, to the “we” of friends and neighbors and co-workers, to the “we” the whole of humankind, the whole human family bearing responsibility to care for one another, wherever we may be and for the creation itself.

As the Japanese author, Kazuaki Tanahashi, has written: “the circle is a reminder that each moment is not just the present, but is inclusive of our gratitude to the past and our responsibility to the future.”

And so this morning, as we remember our own loved ones, we lift up as well the souls of the 11 who died last week at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh and renew our commitment to work, hand-in-hand, heart-in-heart, to build a world where all may live in peace and unafraid.

In a moment, I will read aloud the names of members of our congregation who have gone home to be with God this year. Then there will be a time for all of us to lift up additional names of those near and dear to us.

May this commemoration, and the sacrament of Holy Communion which follows, unite us with them and with Christ, who is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, who encompasses all in the eternal circle of love.

Alleluia! Amen.

Notes:

This Stewardship Sermon Series is based on Diana Butler Bass' book: *Grateful—The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks*. New York: HarperOne, 2018.

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