

All Saints' Day
November 1, 2009

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Today, All Saints' Day, we celebrate all who have gone before us as well as the saints in our current lives. The Isaiah and Revelation readings for today are readings often used at the burial service. These passages speak about the saints of the past, those who have joined the fellowship of the saints who are now in new life. The readings call death devastating, yet they are also comforting for in both we hear about God making something new out of death, of God offering comfort, wiping every tear from our eyes. The Isaiah reading is actually a psalm of thanksgiving. On this mountain the Lord of Hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things; he will swallow up death forever and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces. It's a psalm about tidings of comfort and joy and the Revelation reading is a vision of heaven, the New Jerusalem, a vision of perfection, of wholeness. It reminds us that God is with us and that we are God's people. More words of comfort, more glad tidings. The Revelation passage ends "and God will wipe away every tear from our eyes and death shall be no more. The former things have passed away." Comfort and the overcoming of death, they seem like apt readings when we're celebrating the saints, at least those who have gone before us as we sang "For all the saints who from their labors rest". "The former things have passed away" the readings say, and we sang about that too, "but lo there breaks a yet more glorious day, the saints' triumphant rise in bright array; the King of Glory passes on his way". We cradle Episcopalians love to sing that hymn; we love the glorious company of the apostles. We love the fellowship of the saints. But then in our readings we come to that strange and graphic story, the raising of Lazarus, a story that includes a lot of reality – "don't open the tomb for after four days there will be a stench". Lazarus returning to life offers another vision, overcoming death through the power of God. There are lots of reasons why it's a rich story for All Saints' Day. Now the Gospel of John always challenges us with multiple levels of meaning and the writer of the Gospel wants us to know in no uncertain terms that Jesus, Son of God, can work miracles. For me the most powerful line in this very powerful story is not that wonderful rich line which in other translations is the shortest line in the Bible – "Jesus wept" -- many of us love to preach on that line – Jesus wept or Jesus began to weep for it reminds us specifically that Jesus was indeed human; he cried, he had emotions. Though I love that line but most powerful for me? No, nor is it the powerful command of Jesus, the line we love to hear in this dramatic story, the line vowed particularly loudly proclaimed "Lazarus, come out!". John even tells that Jesus delivers that command in a loud voice: "**Lazarus, come out!**" It makes for great drama, but my favorite is the supremely powerful line, the closing line of this passage. "**Unbind him, and let him go!**" Unbind him, free him. Because John works in metaphor, I like to interpret this line as Jesus' freeing message of new life of the constant resurrections we people of faith have experienced when we have allowed something to die. Something destruction, something dangerous perhaps or unhealthy; when we let go our demon perhaps our hatred of someone else, perhaps our hatred of ourselves; perhaps our addiction; perhaps our refusal to forgive ourselves or another. When we have through the grace of God let go of those demons, we have been

unbound and when we've done so, we have moved into new life. Ask any addict who lives a life of recovery or any person in a restored relationship after long brokenness. Now today, All Saints' Day, is the day we celebrate the fellowship of the saints, holy people, past and present. Our beloved hymn emphasizes the glory of the saints, distorts somewhat who the saints are. We sang, "We feebly struggle; they in glory shine". That line for me has always set up the dynamic that none of us can be saints because we're too human, we're too imperfect. "We feebly struggle" is the part that gets us in trouble. During this time here at Trinity our annual campaign as we hear week after week ministry minutes tells us of the varied works of ministry Trinity folks are carrying out and therefore we are hearing about the saints among us, not glorious people, known throughout Christendom, bigger than life, no not at all, normal people, many of us. One of my colleagues likes to say that a saint is anyone who asks God for forgiveness. A saint is anyone who asks God to be forgiven. Now there's another statement of power, just like "unbind me". "Forgive me". When we recognize that we err and stray like lost sheep and we are forgiven, then we're unbound, aren't we? We're unbound! We're forgiven! We are saints. For the last two weeks and today and the next two weeks we will hear of our Trinity saints, folks who every week as they worship their God, ask God's forgiveness; folks who week after week for the love of God do small and big things. Small things such as write letters, make phone calls, you'll hear a bit more about in pastoral care's minutes in a few minutes and then big things such as tithe a tenth of their income to those who need it or give many hours a week working on large projects. Think Charyl Cathey and Pricilla Cowell who are co-chairing Trinity's Outreach Ministries this year -- large projects. And think of the youngest saint -- baby Leo fast asleep in our front pew who in a few minutes by water and the Holy Spirit will join the fellowship of the saints who one day will learn from both parents and church school teachers to ask God's forgiveness. Think of this babe and give thanks for he too will be part of the body of Christ and a way we can perform saint-like actions, simple unheralded, meaningful actions will be by knowing him, loving him and his family, being part of his church family in the years to come as Leo grows in the faith. We celebrate today on this wondrous feast of the church God's beloved children, known and unknown who celebrate the message of Jesus the Christ. Unbind him! God's beloved children, children of all ages who throughout their lives on earth experience time and time again a yet more glorious day for lo, the former things can pass away. We celebrate new life today; we celebrate new life every Sunday, for Sunday is a celebration of resurrection, a little Easter. Today, dear saints of God, we are unbound.