



SAINT ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

306 N. Division Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104 • (734) 663-0518 • www.standrewsaa.org

Sermon for Sunday, November 4, 2018

All Saints' Sunday

ROBERT WESTVEER

Isaiah 25:6-9 | Psalm 24 | Revelation 21:1-6a | John 11:32-44

Space...Time...Matter. That sounds more like the beginning of a science fiction story than the beginning of a sermon. Yet, these are the themes that run through today's readings. More precisely, the texts we have for this All Saint's Day Service center around sacred space, sacred time and sacred matter. Sacred space consists of the places where the saints gather together to support each other and to experience God's presence. Sacred time revolves around what the saints are expected to do while they await the coming of God's kingdom. Sacred matter involves the dawning recognition by the saints that heaven and earth are more closely linked than they had realized. We do not so much go up to heaven than that heaven comes down to us.

When the Psalmist asks: "Who can ascend to the hill of the Lord? And who can stand in that holy place" we enter sacred space. The saints are not solitary individuals but are part of a community which gathers together to support each other and to "receive a blessing from the Lord." Then something unexpected happens. The Psalmist cries out with joy: "Lift up your heads, O gates; lift them high, O everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in." So it is God who comes down to us rather we traveling up to God. The saints are those who open their hearts, their lives, their churches and their world so that the God of glory can come in. It is as if we, gathered here at St. Andrews on this Sunday, were also to shout out: "Open that front door of the church—open it wide—so that the God of glory can join us."

It is in this sacred space that we also enter into sacred time. It is here, in this sacred space, that we daily pray: "Your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as in heaven. It was the same for the saints gathered with the Psalmist in Jerusalem. The Psalmist states: "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world and all who dwell therein." This is more than a statement of faith or hope for the future. God called the saints to work together with God to make this a present reality.

This understanding is also clearly spelled out in the reading from Revelation. In Psalm 24, the saints had been gathered in a sacred but imperfect place to await for the presence of God. In Revelation, we see that all the flaws and

imperfections of the physical temple have been wiped clean. Sacred space has now revealed itself as sacred matter. The "holy city, the new Jerusalem" comes down out of heaven. Just as in Psalm 24, the saints had confidently expected the presence of God in their space so now the seer says: "See, the home of God is among mortals. God will dwell with them and they will be the people of God."

The sacred time in which we prayed for the coming of the Kingdom on earth as in heaven has been accomplished. Louis Armstrong's well-known gospel spiritual goes like this: "O, when the saints, O when the saints go marching in, O Lord, I want to be in their number when the saints go marching in." I had always thought that meant the saints were marching out of this world and into heaven. But our readings today strongly suggest that I have it backwards. The saints are not marching into heaven from this world but out of heaven back into this world. Perhaps we might better see heaven as a hotel where we stay while repairs are being made to our real home here on earth. Perhaps we might better see heaven as a hospital we enter to be healed of our diseases. But no one wants to live in a hospital forever. We want to go home.

So sacred space and sacred time have merged into sacred matter. If, indeed, the saints are marching back into this world when God has fully redeemed and restored it, perhaps the song they will be singing will be: "This is my Father's world, why should my heart be sad. The Lord is king, let the heavens ring. God reigns, let the earth be glad." The Psalmist will join, proclaiming: "The earth is the Lord's and all that is, the world and all who dwell therein." And they are now answered by the voice of the One seated on the throne: "See, I am making all things new."

We will no longer complain of wobbly legs, stiff knees, aching backs or arthritic hands. We will no longer need glasses. We will no longer need to worry about whether the batteries in or hearing aids are fully charged. And the reason the saints can so confidently assert this is because the One who sits on the throne in our passage from Revelation is none other than Jesus in our gospel passage.

Jesus enters that sacred space where Martha, Mary and their neighbors had gathered to grieve over the death of their brother Lazarus. Jesus then entered into sacred time by saying: "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I know that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing by." Having done that, Jesus cries out: "Lazarus, come forth!" And Lazarus does come out, still bound in his burial shroud. When Jesus tells the people there to release him, he gives us a sign, a symbol and a foretaste of what awaits us as well.

Space...time...matter. We have entered sacred space today to meet God. Having met God, we have heard God's call to enter sacred time, to pray and to work with God in the redemption of our world. With Isaiah, we pray that "God will destroy on this mountain [this sacred place] the shroud that is cast over the peoples [like that which bound Lazarus] and the burial sheet that is spread over all the nations. God will swallow up death forever."

And so, with Isaiah, we too will shout out: "Lo, here is our God for whom we have waited so that God might save us. Here is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in our salvation."

Amen.