

All Saints Sunday 2021

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

Pastor Stephen Springer

November 6, 2021

Revelation 21:1-6a

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends:

Today this congregation celebrates our part of the Halloween bundle. The bundle of days that is variously called Halloween, All Hallows' Day, All Souls Day, the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed, or as we refer to it in this congregation: All Saints Day. Our sisters and brothers in Mexico and other parts of Latin America refer to it as *El Dia de los Muertos*, the Day of the Dead. Tucson's own All Souls Procession will take place downtown, this evening. It's a bundle—my term for it— it's a bundle of days and a bundle of titles. "All Saints" is our very churchly version of it. Very rooted in Christian history, very solid, very well vetted. Which is what I expect from Lutherans.

Our prayer of the day on this occasion uses the verb knit. "Almighty God, you have knit your people together." It seems to me that it ought to be knitted. You have knitted your people together. It's the present perfect tense. But it's from sixteenth century England, so I have to assume the English know their grammar better than I do. God knits his people together. In one communion of saints. In the mystical body of Jesus Christ our Lord. And for our purposes on this day, I propose that we contrast God's knitting with our loose ends. God's perfect knitting ties everything together. Securely. Perfectly. And that's good news because we have a lot of loose ends.

I don't know a lot about ghosts. I should, because there are plenty of television reality shows about ghost hunters. There's plenty of information available for me if I would only accept it. Ghosts and hauntings are described in different ways. But in a lot of cases, there is a piece of unfinished business. The reason that the ghost is hanging around is that there is unfinished business. An injustice that needs to be righted. A tribute that needs to be paid. A loss or betrayal that needs to be acknowledged. The spirit should be at rest. But it isn't at rest, because of a loose end. Unfinished business.

Now I don't know if you have direct experience of a ghost or a haunting. But even skeptics will sometimes say that they are haunted by a mistake or a wrong from the past. And when someone has died, we can't address the mistakes and the wrongs. We can't get closure. We have loose ends. It's a good thing God is knitting. Because sometimes we have loose ends. And I'm talking about in the best of times: death leaves loose ends.

And these are not the best of times. The official Covid death toll in the United States stands at 754,000. We have not yet come close to apprehending and integrating that loss. During the first year of the pandemic, we were generally not allowed into hospitals to see our loved ones. There has been a loss of life that is unimaginable. And many, many of those deaths left a lot of loose ends. A lack of closure. It will take years for us to collectively integrate this loss and this trauma. The people who got saddled with the greatest burdens were the hospital employees who tended to these patients. And plenty of them have left their vocations and gone into early retirement or sought a new line of work. And that is a representation of the price and the pain that we will be coming to terms with for many, many years. It's a good thing God is knitting. Because that's a lot of loose ends.

The principal knitting that is intended by our prayer of the day is the knitting together of the church on earth with the church in heaven. Christians who are alive and Christians who have passed away. In old fashioned language, the church militant and the church triumphant. You and I are the church militant. Because we are on the spiritual battlefield. And our departed loved ones are the church triumphant. In the words of the great hymn, "For all the Saints," *O blest communion, fellowship divine. We feebly struggle, they in glory shine.* We, the church militant, still struggle. Feebly. We are not a very great military. They, the church triumphant, shine in glory. *O blest communion, fellowship divine. We feebly struggle, they in glory shine. Yet all are one in thee for all are thine.* That's the knitting. All are one in thee. What our prayer calls the mystical body of Jesus Christ our Lord. *In him all things hold together,* Colossians says. [Col. 1:17-18] *In him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.* That's the knitting.

So our departed loved ones are far away. Far away in some happy place. And yet they are as close as Jesus Christ. And Jesus isn't really far away. Even though he is. It's a *mystical* body. A communion that cannot be easily explained. But in the church, in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, we assert that we are very close to the Lord Jesus Christ. He comes close to us. *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.* And as he draws close to us, he brings with him the church of heaven. All the faithful departed. All souls. All the saints who from their labors rest. So in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, we say that "*with the church on earth, and the hosts of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn.*"

I'm calling it the Lord's Supper because Lutherans habitually refer to it as communion. That's fine. It wouldn't kill us to occasionally call it the eucharist. Or the Lord's Supper. Or even the mass. And the reason I say that is because we overlook the radicality of the word "communion" when we overuse it. It asserts our unity with Christians of every time and every place. It asserts the communion of saints that takes place at the Lord's Supper. The church on earth and the hosts of heaven. The church militant and the church triumphant.

So today we recite the creed of baptism, which asserts the communion of saints. It's not a statement about the Lord's Supper. It's a statement about the unity of Christians on earth with

Christians in heaven. And when we name and think about the people we have lost in the past year, or in the past many years, we stand in the promises of God. His eye is on the sparrow. Even the hairs of our head are numbered. And as we go out into a world of loose ends, we can take comfort and share comfort in the knowledge that God is still knitting. God is still knitting. Amen.