

We are Not Alone

In a world that seems to be losing its mind lately, thank goodness we are given the gift of these readings today; readings that whisper and shout and remind us of the most important truth of all: we are not alone!

No, not in the sense of ET and aliens from outer space, but in the sense of Isaiah and Revelation and smelly, once dead, now called back to life, Lazarus.

We are not alone!

Which says a lot about how we might think about living our lives, where we might direct our energies, and in whom we might place our hope.

While I'm sure none of you have noticed these last 9 years, I tend to be an Action Jackson kind of fellow.

If there's a problem, let's fix it!

A need, let's fill it!

A dream, let's achieve it!

I'm pretty sure a lot of you are just the same.

And yet, today's readings grab people like me, and people like you, and sit us down by the fireside and remind us that when all is said and done, it is God who is in charge, it is God who has "got this," it is God who promises to make all things whole and beautiful and new.

Just listen for a moment....

From Isaiah:

“On this mountain **the Lord of hosts will make** for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines...

And **he will destroy** on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; **he will swallow up death forever.**

Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces...”

From Revelation:

“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...”

From John:

“**...Lazarus, come out!**”

And the .. dead ... man ... came ... out...!, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth.

Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, and let him go.’”

What beautiful promises!

What striking images these three readings give us this morning, as we celebrate all of the saints who have gone before us, as we too seek to find our place in the parade of saints that continues to march on to that long hoped for day of glory.

And yet how hard it is most days to accept that these promises, these images of a world as yet unborn, are true.

How hard it is to accept that when all is said and done, God has it all under control.

We have been through a horrific few weeks.

Numerous bombs sent through the mail to political leaders.

Eleven of our Jewish sisters and brothers, at a Sabbath service devoted to giving children their names, massacred by the hate of anti-semitic fear.

Eight thousand, or is it now fifteen thousand troops, deployed to our southern border to confront a rag tag bunch of desperate families, seeking only to breathe free.

Add to these calamities the barbaric murder of a journalist who was strangled, mutilated and killed because he had the gall to criticize the 33 year old crown prince of Saudi Arabia.

And then there is the member of the Unitarian church on the border with Mexico, arrested and indicted for giving food to migrants, who is now on trial in federal court.

Our government, which so adamantly protects the rights of those who refuse on religious grounds to bake wedding cakes for gay couples, is arguing in court that this man's faith does not require him to help immigrants, and therefore his defense — that his faith indeed demands that he do so — should be rejected.

Of course, unlike baking cakes for gay people, a subject upon which the Bible is silent, the command to help the immigrant, to treat the alien as family, is as old as the Older Testament.

There are over 100 specific demands from God that we look out for, care for and tend to the needs of immigrants.

From Leviticus: "You shall have the same rule for the sojourner and for the native, for I am the Lord your God..."

to Deuteronomy: "He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing..."

to James: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."

Caring for the stranger, for the vulnerable, is at the heart of our Judeo-Christian heritage, and so when we see Bible thumping self proclaimed nationalists ringing the alarm against immigrants, the question is, why?

How can so many fail to embrace one of the core pillars of our faith?

More specifically, given the events of this week, what is causing such a rise in anti-semitism in our world today?

While some say the Jews are an easy target because they are a relatively small but prominent group in many societies, I wonder if something else is going on?

I wonder if it may be that twist in human nature that is afraid of hope?

Because, from the earliest days, the Jewish people have been the repository of hope for the world.

That hope is the author of each of our three readings today.

The Jewish people have received and nourished and shared the promise of God that everything will be healed, made new, redeemed.

And yet they have been the targets of so many down through the ages — because it seems that something within us rebels against hope — and when we do, we find ourselves hunkering down, becoming afraid of one another, and looking for the strong man to lead us.

These are perilous times.

Strong men — with authoritarian tendencies — are securing election victories from the United States to Brazil to Italy, Austria, Hungary and the Philippines.

The stench of looming fascism is everywhere.

Whereas in 1995, only 1 in 16 Americans agreed we'd be better off exchanging our democracy for military rule, this year, an astonishing 1 in 6 agree, with 30 somethings, the millennial generation, leading the way.

Why are we so quick to surrender to fear, bigotry and violence?

Why are we so prone to rebel against hope?

Perhaps because the entry way into hope is through the doorway marked "Death."

And we fear death because it is the great unknown.

We fear death because over it, we have no control.

And yet, what this All Saints Day begs us to remember is that "if God can raise someone from the dead in the middle of human history — doesn't that very fact reveal that death is not inevitable?"

What if God is not only capable of forgiving us all things, but what if the shape of God's forgiveness reaches directly into, and undoes,

reverses, brings to an end, the twisted, human reality of death?" James Allison. paraphrased.

What if it is true that death no longer has the last word over any human life?

What if we begin to see each other, and all of life, through the lens of the resurrection?

Might we then return to a place where hope can once again begin to grow, because death, the doorway to hope, has lost its power over us?

Isn't this the very meaning of the cross?

That even when everything seems lost, even when God seems to have hidden herself completely, it is precisely then that the presence and power of God whispers:

"You are not alone."

"And the one who was seated on the throne says,

'See, I am making all things new.'

And he says,

'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.'

Then he says to me,

'It is finished!

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end."

+amen

