

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

All Saints Day: November 3, 2024

“Transformation”

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church on the day we celebrate those we love but no longer see. In today's readings we get the understanding that life as we know it, or should I say, think we know it, is not very much when compared to the power of life and death that are clearly displayed as the glory of God in today's Gospel.

“Oh God, don't take these beautiful things that I've got” sings Benson Boone in one of the latest pop songs on the radio. Benson describes in his lyrics the razors edge we all walk because even when we find peace, family and love in our lives, he sings referring to God, “I know the things He gives me He can take away.” This is the dilemma of being human.

“Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.” In other words, Jesus, can you give me what God has taken away. Then Jesus weeps.

But why did Jesus weep? Those around him probably assumed it was for sorrow at the loss of his friend. But Jesus more than likely knew before he ever headed out to Bethany that he would be raising Lazarus from the dead.

Jesus wept, not because he had lost a friend, but because the scene around him was full of chaos; full of the very suffering he had come to eliminate once and for all. Hope for resurrection (something he had been trying to explain with words like "living water)", in their grief had been displaced by the havoc of despair and death. Those who accompanied Jesus to the tomb didn't understand that Jesus wasn't weeping for Lazarus; he was weeping for *them*.

But today I would like to take a moment to focus on the condition of Lazarus. Jesus calls out to him and Lazarus comes, still bound hands and feet. Jesus has now in tandem with the Creator transformed Lazarus who then needs assistance from those around him who are told to unbind him.

Imagine waking up in that cave, wrapped tightly in cloth, unable to pull the covering off your own face, because your hands are still bound. It's dark, and it stinks in there. What you smell is your own flesh, that somehow isn't rotting anymore. But the stench is still hanging in the cave around you.

And then you must decide. Do you fall back into the tomb, or do you step out into the unknown? Because what lies ahead is completely new territory. No one has ever done this before. No one has ever been completely, unquestionably dead, and then been called back to life after being buried in a tomb for days.

You are here today because somehow Jesus has called you to come out of your darkness, your fear, your anxiety. He has arranged a Gospel reading for you to understand that death is another transformation into a new life. Our lives on this earth are limited but God is not taking the beautiful things that we have, but rather through his son, Jesus Christ, he is transforming things into a new life.

Today, as we remember all those who have come before us - those we love but see no longer - let us understand the transforming power of Jesus. Let us understand that those we love are with us in complex and multiple ways; from the shape of our face, the color of our eyes, to how we carry ourselves through the world, to a resurrected soul we can only imagine. And ultimately through the work of Jesus Christ as savior of the world, we know these loved ones now see the new heaven and new earth.

Today's question is: do you fall back into the tomb or do you step out into the unknown? Do you trust in God enough to be confident to walk in unbounded faith until Jesus calls you home to rejoice with all the saints? Amen.