

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Grace to you and peace from God, our Creator and our resurrected Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Today, we observe and celebrate All Saints Sunday as we remember and honor all those who have died in the last year and beyond. This can be a painful and uncomfortable time as we wrestle with the sting of death in our own lives.

Whether it be family, friends, loved ones, or even those we do not know personally but still weigh on our hearts, death sits on our hearts and minds. Even when we are confident in the promise of resurrection and assured of God's love, those feelings of loss and sadness are hard to shake.

Even in our Gospel lesson, Jesus finds his good friend, Mary, deeply distressed. She falls at His feet in anguish. Her brother, Lazarus, was sick and has died. She and her sister, Martha, had sent word to Jesus, begging that he come to Bethany to heal their brother Lazarus, a good friend of Jesus.

Now we didn't read all of John 11 but throughout the passage, Jesus is made aware of what is happening with Lazarus. He seems to know what is to come and he does not exhibit any great emotion, at first. Indeed, he talks first to his disciples about Lazarus' death and then later, Martha approaches Jesus and tells Him the news about her brother.

When Mary comes to Jesus and relays the news with much sorrow, Jesus is deeply affected by it. He is greatly moved in spirit and Jesus even begins to weep.

In fact, the Greek word that is translated to “deeply moved” actually has a connotation with anger. Jesus is having intense, palpable emotions over the death of His friend. Even knowing what was to come and the power God has, Jesus feels deeply the sting of death.

Jesus had seen his disciples, both the sisters, and a crowd who had come to pay their respects to Lazarus, all drained and upset about this death. A whole community of people that Jesus loved and knew were overwhelmed with grief.

On this All Saints Sunday, we are reminded of the pain that death brings into this world but we are also reminded of how interconnected we are, that our individualism gives way to a world shaped by community with one another. Jesus grieved with this beloved community over the death of their friend. When Jesus speaks to God and calls Lazarus out of the tomb, it is done once again in community. Miracles done in community.

Our interconnectedness, that shapes the way we live, learn, grieve, and transform, goes so deep that it is easy to underestimate just how much we rely on one another and all of our ancestors that have come before us. My mind is drawn first to an example not from sociology or theology but an essay I once read about economics.

“I, Pencil,” written in 1958 by Leonard Read is certainly meant to teach economic theory but I am much more interested in the poetic way that Read attempts to do this. He writes from the point of view of a pencil as it writes down its own ancestry, how it came to be.

The essay explores in detail all the processes that go into the creation of a pencil. We may think, at first, of the wood, the lead, the eraser, but the essay expands this. The machines and the transportation needed to move and create the materials had to be created somehow. Power to supply these machines with energy has to be harvested or harnessed. The tools to do harvesting have to be created. Yes, even the person who picked the coffee cherry so that someone else could have a cup of coffee, had a hand in the making of this humble pencil.

It is easy to focus in on our own ability and how we create, live, or learn. The world is far more interconnected, we rely on so many people, each in important and meaningful ways. It becomes easier, the further out from the process we are, to discount the work and value of someone still vitally important in our lives.

I could tell you that this morning I enjoyed a homemade cup of coffee but it would not be an unrealistic number to suggest that thousands of people helped to make that coffee a reality.

So to, we remember our ancestors who have gone before us today. We feel the weight of loss when someone close to us has died and today we celebrate them along with so many others who have brought us into this moment. There are countless people through time and history that have helped shape us into the people we are today who we may not even know now.

We are interconnected, all that is now has come from all that has been. In that humility, we can truly cherish and understand why it is so painful to lose those we love. We would not be who we are without the saints before.

This leads us to a time of waiting. We have started today our first week of the Advent season. This is a time of waiting; waiting for the birth of Christ that we celebrate on Christmas day and waiting for the time that Jesus will come again. The promise of eternal life and resurrection is one that gives us hope in our community of faith.

We wait in community like Mary and Martha who waited for Jesus as their brother died. We wait and grieve together, as Jesus did, with the loved ones of Lazarus. We wait and see the amazing things that God does in this world and the resurrection that comes through Christ.

This Advent season at Wicker Park, we will be supporting organizations who seek to be the hands and feet of Jesus in community, living lives with the mind of abundance. These organizations all seek to make sure all are nourished and fed, respecting the dignity and worth of all people.

We can see the way Jesus performs an amazing miracle when He raises Lazarus from the dead. This is a reassuring and inspiring moment of God's promise and love. Do we recognize the miracle when we enter the grocery store and see the abundance of food? Are we inspired by the thousands or more that made it possible for the food to be there? We would not try to hoard Jesus' miraculous love, why then do so many around the world and in our hometown continue to go hungry?

In this time of waiting, waiting in this community of love together, let us be moved to share the miraculous love of Christ. We certainly will not make Lazarus rise from the grave as Jesus did but we still make a difference. We can give of our time,

talents, and treasures as we seek to feed people now who are hungry and address the systems of poverty and inequality that perpetuate hunger.

We make a difference in the lives of our friends and families, in each other's lives, and in the lives of so many that we never meet. We can live in the mindset of abundance, that God provides for us and loves us graciously. We are blessed so much and even in the pain of hunger, loss, and death, we are comforted in knowing that Christ will always love us in our lives today, in our death, and we will be joined together again with the saints in life eternal.

Let us pray. Dear Lord, we wait with you in anticipation of the world to come. We remember those who have gone before us and the many ways they shaped our lives then and now. We give thanks that you welcome them into your kingdom. Go with us and remind us that we are deeply connected with so many, some that we know and others we do not. Train our hearts to give thanks for your abundance and move us to work tirelessly to share your abundance with all. Amen.