

Happy All Saints' Sunday. This is the day that we celebrate the saints above who have passed over and give us examples of daily spiritual living. It's also the day that we celebrate those saints on earth that bring us closer to God and show how to live faithfully.

You may have noticed that the altar frontal is white as well as my stole. I have many white soles to choose from but based on the Gospel lesson today – about the religious leaders that like to wear wide stoles – I thought I'd find the widest and biggest I could find. Why? Because today's lesson is a good reminder, a good gut-check if you will, for all priest and pastors and religious leaders to see if we are doing what God wants; are we helping others along their spiritual path or are we, as Jesus was pointing out from the 1st century, are we putting heavy burdens on people that we ourselves are not willing to lift?

What do you think all the lessons today have in common with each other? The first lesson, from Joshua, is about the Israelites who are about to (finally) cross into the Promised Land. They are stopped on the bank of the Jordan River. It is springtime and the river is overflowing its banks. As Joshua was worrying about how to cross, God told him to carry the Ark of the Covenant; you know, the one made famous in the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*; that ark is the one God said for twelve priests, one from each tribe, to carry the ark into the river. When the “soles of their feet touched the water” the river stopped flowing.

What does that have to do with Psalm 107: *Some wandered in desert wastes; they found no way to a city where they might dwell. They were hungry and thirsty; their spirits languished within them.*

The Epistle reading, from the First Letter of John, states that the world did not recognize Jesus therefore the world does not recognize us.

Then the Gospel: Woe to you Pharisees, Scribes, hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup but inside it is full of greed and self-indulgence – just like you! You are like white washed tombs that are pretty on the outside but inside are full of dead bones and filth!

What do all these passages have in common with each other? They are all about hope. Yes, hope. Let's start with Joshua. Have you ever taken over a business, a classroom, a group of people that had a wildly popular leader? It is difficult to follow someone like that. Sometimes in hospital rooms, the nurse or doctor has to follow a well-liked medical professional. It's difficult. Imagine how hard it was for Joshua. He has to fill Moses shoes! ... or sandals, or whatever they wore back then. Moses – he led them out of captivity and through decades in the wilderness. He brought the ten commandments and a very close relationship with God. Try following that guy!

But this passage is about hope. God told Joshua that the presence of the Lord is with him. He has the ten commandments – the Ark of the Covenant that is the representation of God-is-with-us. Take what God has given – the commandments – and march first with them into the water. As soon as he did, the water was held back; just like at the Red Sea with Moses. God held the water back so they could cross on dry land to the Promised Land. This passage holds hope for all the people of the Jewish faith that is God is with them today and will be with them. Even those Moses and Joshua are long gone, God is still with them.

The psalm – *They were hungry and thirsty; their spirits languished within them. The next line: They cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He put their feet on a straight path to go to a city where they might dwell.* That is some hope made manifest! “They cried to the Lord” and God delivered them. We too can cry to the Lord and God will deliver us too.

The Epistle has hope – they didn’t recognize Jesus, they don’t recognize us either. It’s not that we’re doing something wrong; it’s just how it is. The world didn’t see Jesus; the world isn’t going to see us either. But, we keep going. We’re children of God! One day Jesus will appear and the world will see him, and us, as his likeness. So hold on; hold on to hope and faith.

And then the Gospel – this is Good News and hope. Jesus was calling out the prevailing religious community that was making it more and more difficult to follow God. Before he said the leaders were putting heavy burdens on them he said: *Come to me all you who are carrying heavy loads and are stressed out and worried and anxious; come to me. I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. I am humble and gentle in heart. My load is easy and my burden is light.* In contrast, the religious leaders of the day did the opposite. Jesus is giving good news – just like the Ark that goes ahead and before us, God’s presence that is with us at all times and all places, Jesus invites us to himself; especially those who are stressed out, anxious, and feel the weight of the world on them. Come to Jesus – he will give you rest.

Let’s go back to the Jordan River. We have some folks at All Angels who have been baptized in that river. So was Jesus; by John the Baptizer. Plus thousands of others. We believe that Jesus put his robe of righteousness in the river so that in our baptism we can put on his robe. It doesn’t matter if your baptism was far away from the Jordan. The earth is a closed eco-system. All the water we have now is pretty much the same water we had in the 1st Century. The same water that the Ark of the Covenant stopped, so they could walk on dry land, is the same water Jesus was baptized in. It’s the same water you were baptized with.

In the Early Church, they referred to heaven as the other side of the river. We could see, barely, over the river but it was too hard to cross. Baptism taught us how to swim. It is the way over to those whom we love but see no longer. It’s the presence of God with us, just like the Ark, that allows us to cross into the Big Promised Land we call heaven. We believe the saints before us have crossed the river and we, one day, will join them too.

That brings us back to All Saint's Day. We have hope that our loved ones are rejoicing on the other side of the river. We have hope that the saints have shown us the path and just as the world didn't recognize Jesus, they don't recognize us either. But that's okay, we have hope and faith and love. So, on this special day, as we remember our loved ones who were like saints to us, we too are full of hope that God-is-with-us and that we too, because of God's grace, pass over the river to the other side and rejoice.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.