

**Sermon for November 4, 2018**  
**The Feast of All Saints**  
**Church of Reconciliation, San Antonio**  
**The Rev. Judith L. Rhodes**

*Living Between The Last Call and Reveille*

Good morning, Saints!

Recently, I read an article about Winston Churchill, arguably one of the greatest statesmen of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It described in some detail, Churchill's funeral, which, like Senator John McCain, he had planned down to every single detail.

Churchill's funeral was held at St. Paul's Cathedral in London and the planning itself was under the code name, "Operation-Hope-Not". (The name itself reveals a lot about humanity's ambivalence when it comes to the subject of mortality and death.) One aspect of his funeral seems absolutely inspired: a bugler played *The Last Post*, which is like the equivalent of *Taps* in the United States, from the West end of the Cathedral. When the somber notes of that solo bugle echoed through the Cathedral, it would be hard to imagine that most stiff upper lips quivered as they could no longer hold back tears of grief and gratitude.

Then a full minute of silence passed. A full minute of utter silence.

And then, surely a surprise to all those mourners crowded into that Cathedral, another bugler, this one positioned in the east, rose to play *Reveille*, the happy- morning bugle call that gives soldiers and scouts the "get up and get going" kick-start to their day. Perhaps after the tears, a few suppressed chuckles slipped out. Always a commanding presence, even from the dead, Churchill relayed two important messages.

First, he offered a testimony to the shock, joy, and surprise of the Resurrection. The story reminded me of my Dad, himself a Salvation Army cornet player, who would position himself between the end of my sister Marianne's bed and mine, very early in the morning of the start day to a family vacation, and play *Reveille* as our wake up call! How appropriate on the day of Churchill's funeral, he would use that wake up call as a reminder of the Resurrection promise made at each of our baptisms. We die with Christ just as sure as we rise with him.

It wasn't random that the *Reveille* came from the east, where the sun rises, the direction the altar faces in many churches, and the direction from which we expect that Christ will come again.

Secondly, Churchill bid the mourners to press on, to attend to the day at hand, and the life still ahead for those who remain on their earthly pilgrimage.

In my home office, I have several bookcases filled with precious books I cannot seem to part with and in all honesty, the several I continue to add to the collection. On one shelf, directly in eye shot, off to my right, I have one of my favorite pictures of my parents. It was taken during a vacation and my Dad has his arm around my Mom's waist as she casually leans against the railing of a balcony. My Dad has his characteristic smile ... the one I can still to this day, conjure in my mind's eye. When I need a little encouragement or a reminder of how blessed I am in my life, I look over, and I smile in return. It never fails.

On another shelf, I have two pictures, postcards, really of my sister, Marianne with her husband, Frank, and her grandson, Francis. As this feast day of All Saints approached, I moved Marianne's picture onto the same shelf as my parents. She wears the same, sweet smile... Slowly but surely, I am smiling in return at her picture, too.

I imagine each of them, along with the myriad saints who have blessed my life's journey, beaming with the radiance of resurrection joy. This feast of All Saints has always been one of my favorite feast days of the church year. And this year, as I thank God once again for those saints who blessed my life, especially my sister, Marianne, I rejoice at the promise of Resurrection now fulfilled for them.

Yet, we, like those mourners in St. Paul's Cathedral in London, continue to live in the space in between *The Last Call* and *Reveille*. We learn how to grieve and how to rejoice in the very same moment. We learn how to trust, how to remain people of hope, in the very face of the little and big deaths we endure along our earthly journeys.

Somewhere, in the silence between those melodies, we wait for God to descend among us and wipe every tear from our eyes. And miraculously, God does, time and time again.

I love this passage from Isaiah we heard proclaimed this morning. As most of you know, I grew up in a "restaurant", foodie family. There was nothing my Dad loved more than providing exquisite hospitality and delectable dishes to those who would grace his establishments. Every table was to be considered sacred and every guest, a member of the family.

To this day, I love setting a table... whether for Martha and me or for several guests around our dining room table. And here, my friends, this most sacred table of all, where we are nourished in body and soul, with the bread of life and cup of salvation, we are reminded that at every table, Christ is present, even in the in-between.

And what about our Gospel this morning from St. John, where we experience the tears of Jesus, himself, as he weeps for his friend, Lazarus. Jesus knows your tears and mine, and in his own tears, ours become holy, and our grief, sacred.

As you listen to Mary's words, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." I hear my own thoughts spoken aloud. Where were you for Marianne? Where were you, God, our Creator, for the victims of murder at the Tree of Life synagogue and all the many individual and groups of people who become targets, identified as "other, enemy, throwaways"? Yes. God weeps. Yes. Jesus still weeps.

And for us as Christians, Jesus takes Mary's words, mine, and yours, and makes of them a prayer. He blesses even her words of anger and grief. And then... in the midst of his own distress, **he takes charge**.

Jesus instructs those around him to take away the stone. And he commands Lazarus to "Come out!" from the tomb of death... to be unbound and set free.

How do you hear Jesus' command, "Take away the stone." What hindrances have you and I placed between Jesus and our heart? What needs to be removed in order for Jesus to come more closely, more intimately into your heart and into your life?

Just as Jesus commands Lazarus to "come out" from his tomb, how is Jesus calling us out of our own dark, isolated, places of death and despair? The places of self-doubt, unworthiness, guilt, and desperation that can, like a tomb, hold us hostage to darkness and blind us to the light of our authentic nature as a beloved child of God.

In Jesus' instructions to those around him, "Unbind him and let him go." How is Jesus calling us to lives of servanthood and freedom? To whom is Jesus sending us to be liberators and witnesses to his way of Love?

Or it just may be, that you and I need others to come alongside and help unbind us and open up a new path of freedom and abundant life in Jesus.

Just as Jesus raised his friend, Lazarus, we are called to resurrection living. Living in the freedom that is our faith in Jesus Christ. Living in the hope that is the Resurrection promise made to each of us in our baptism.

Today, my friends, let us tune our ears to hear the choir of angels and archangels singing to the glory of God... *Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your Glory. Hosanna in the Highest!*

Heaven **AND** Earth... are full of your Glory...

On Tuesday evening, Robert and I, and over 1000 others prayed, wept, and witnessed something of the power of the love of God as we mourned the murders of the faithful Jews at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh. We sat side by side listening to the Rabbis tell us of the lives of meaning so violently ended while they prayed. We came alongside one another, seeing in the diverse faces of each person there, the image and likeness of God, our one Creator. At the conclusion of the service, Rabbi Mara Nathan called all the clergy, religious and civic leaders to come forward and stand together as we sang the final hymn, This land is your land. On that night that hymn touched my heart as never before as I stood next to a Muslim woman in her traditional dress, next to the Rabbi who had helped lead the service, looking out at the rainbow people of God who stood to sing... It was a powerful and humbling moment of witness to the truth that matters most... Each of us, as beautifully different and diverse as we are, reflect something of our Creator... and without one of us, that Divine reflection becomes incomplete. Each of us needs all of us. All of us needs each of us.

I believe that is what Jesus was getting at in the Gospel today. By him, with him and through him, Lazarus was called from the tomb. But the work of unbinding him and setting him free became the work of his disciples. In that moment, his work became the work of each and everyone who would dare call himself or herself a disciple.

Are you a disciple? How will you unbind, set free, and witness to his radical and inclusive love.

Please stand, saints and disciples and sing with me, one verse of This land is your land...

Will we press on as disciples of Jesus Christ in his Way of Love?

Amen.