

John Sampson

“All Souls”

Text: Matthew 5:1 - 12

Preached at KVCC

November 5, 2017

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer. AMEN.

This week has been a week to think about the dead.

We hosted Halloween here at the church for the second year in a row and it was FUN! We had zombies and ghosts, skeletons and vampires...we also welcomed a family of hot dogs! There were floating ghosts projected up on the church steeple, and haunting music pouring out from our organ, played by a Phantom.

Halloween, a day when our culture tells us that the gates to the other side open, and those beings who have preceded us in death come back and revisit the living, for... Milk Way bars, and M&Ms.

But it's not just our culture that imbues this time of year with a special connection to the dead. Some of us here today, especially from Catholic and Episcopal backgrounds, will also remember the special church services that acknowledge the saints, those who have been deeply touched by God's reality in their lives, and also all of the uncanonized people who have touched our lives, in the special services for All Saints Day, and All Souls Day. These are days when we remember those who have died and the church prays for their reunion with God.

But this has also been a moment of another deadly terror attack, this time in New York City where a man drove a truck through a crowd killing 8 people. The perpetrator had been doing Google searches on

Halloween choosing the date to inflict added casualties to a plan he had been creating for over a year.

This has been a week to think of death imaginatively and religiously, but also, unfortunately, a week to be faced with the truth of a world that never seems to be able to rest between acts of murder targeted at the innocent and the ordinary.

What do you think happens after death?

Out of all of the weeks in the year, this is the week we may have asked ourselves this question.

From talking to many of you over the past year I know that there are lots of answers to this question sitting in our pews. For some of us here this morning we believe that we have souls that are spiritual reflections of ourselves and that these souls travel on to a place

called heaven after we die to be with God and reunited with our loved ones who have died before us. For others, we believe that our energy will be remanifest in new bodies moving forward down the ages here on earth. For others, we simply don't know what happens to us when we die.

And just like us, the authors of our Bible have had different answers to this question. For some authors of the earlier books of our scriptures at death humanity simply fell into unconscious oblivion, for others our souls did travel to another place and could be recalled to this world for consultation, and still others believed not in individual resurrection to Heaven or Hell, but in God's raising all of humanity bodily at the end of time for judgment. Like us here this morning, our spiritual ancestors couldn't agree on what they knew about what happens to us after death.

So what if we asked Jesus? What would Jesus tell us happens to us after we die? What would he say to us?

Well, in our reading this morning, Jesus pulls a Jesus. I like the fact that I have begun to use the name Jesus, not just to describe a man, but to define an act of deflection that brings about a deeper insight, or reveals a greater truth, even if it never actually answers the question I may have led with. This day Jesus pulls a Jesus on all of us who might be asking him to finally reveal to us what happens after death.

You see in the passage we heard from Matthew Jesus takes the camera and instead of pointing it out there, out to the graves, and the graveyards, he turns it and points its lens unflinchingly back at us. And looking right into our eyes he says, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” And he’s not talking about some abstract mourners; he’s talking to us because he knows somewhere

deep in our hearts we are all mourning the loss of someone, or something.

Take just a second and conjure up before your minds and hearts the image of someone or something you may have lost, someone who you miss so desperately, something you thought you couldn't live without.

Now I invite you to say that name out loud, to share that name in this space, among these people.

[Names.]

Now hear the good news.

We. We who mourn. We who mourn even this day. We are blessed. And we will be comforted. Our despair, and our sadness. They don't

have ultimate power. I don't say that. A man who is overflowing with the Presence of the Divine says that to us, to all of us. These are the words of Jesus. And what is more. He tells us that we will be comforted; we are already comforted. Comforted by the spirit of God, who is called the author of Love. Comforted by the words and the hearts of our families and friends.

You see in our loss, and in our mourning we haven't been forgotten; we have been seen, and embraced.

By turning the camera's lens from the beyond to the here and now Jesus asks us to put down the speculation about what happens to us after death. The dead will take care of themselves he says somewhere else. He asks us instead to focus on ourselves, those left behind, and invites us to work great acts of compassion and healing in the lives of all of us whose hearts have been shattered by death

and loss. We may not feel comfort now, but Jesus asks us to trust, and know that one day we will be.

This is what blessedness looks like. And this is what God wishes for us in a week where ghosts, and murder, candy and terror have all been mixed up together in a swirl of the dead.

For blessed are you who mourn, for you will be comforted, for you are comforted.

AMEN.