

All Saints' Day

Year C

RCL

Daniel 7:1-3,15-18

Psalm 149

Ephesians 1:11-23

Luke 6:20-31

Norah Woods celebrated her 4th birthday recently. She told her mother how lately she's really been drawn to and loves older persons because of their soft skin, they move at her speed, and in her own words, she wanted to love all of them up before they died. It does get a little dark there at the end, but her mother says her heart is in the right place. While Norah, her sister and mother were picking up birthday cupcakes in the grocery store, Norah said hello to one gentleman, "Hi Old Person, It's my birthday!" Her mother, horrified by Norah's lack of filter, tried to scoop her up, apologize and move on. But the man responded to her and they carried on in conversation for a few minutes. Finding him a few aisles later, Norah wanted a selfie with him and he obliged, continuing their conversation and chatting like old friends. Later that night, moved by the day's events, Norah's mother Tara Woods posted the photo and story on Facebook. She received a private message which shared with her that Mr. Dan, the gentleman they met in the store, lost his beloved wife just months ago, and

his heartbreak and loneliness still affected him daily. The message writer knew how much Mr. Dan was touched by this encounter. From there began a soul friendship: Norah and her mother began visiting Mr. Dan once a week, recognizing each other as family, and giving each other a beautiful new beginning.

All Saints used to be a day reserved for just officially canonized saints of the church- the superheroes of the faith. And it still is, today we remember those in our heritage and faith who have led us fearlessly, who have taught us about God, who have shared the love of Christ Jesus with the world. As a holy day, All Saints' Day has evolved into remembering our own loved ones who we hold in our hearts, but not see anymore. And it also celebrates the saints, you and me, everyone in the world bringing mercy and grace in still on their earthly journeys.

There's no doubt we're intimately connected to one another. Interwoven together like a grove of aspens, our roots connecting with one another for strength, hope, and stability. Sometimes, we forget that: in highly anxious times it's easy to become isolated, to surround ourselves with only those we know, and to turn aside from the world. To place ourselves in a bubble of self-protection. When we react to the world in this way, we only celebrate the richness of what we own and forget the other side of the equation. But saints, or rather the Holy Ones of God, like 4 year

old Norah Woods, teach us that in the best and worst of times, to reach out to one another and outside of ourselves, is God's mission in this world.

God's mission, God's kingdom, is truly an invitation to connection. To say to someone: I hear you and I value you as a person. The act of connection itself is holy. For in connection with one another we hold space for each person. We enter into a very sacred and vulnerable place as we let go to share and receive. Scholar Pamela Cooper White would say that All Saints' Day is about relationship and remembrance. And it's why we share in the sacrament of baptism on this day. For: Baptism immerses us in the waters of life and death so that we are able to die to loneliness and alienation, and to die to the need to rely only on our strength. Out of the water, we rise again to new life—a life of complexity and richness, a life of community, a life now led as a member of the body of Christ—a life of service Year C, Volume 4: Season After Pentecost 2 (Propers 17-Reign of Christ).

Think for a moment about why you attend St. A's. When people are surveyed about why they attend, some answer the beauty of the music and worship, others answer about the fellowship and reaching out to our local city and world. And in almost all the answers, people say they attend because of the community of people: a community of people that for over a century have worshiped together- have grown together in God's love, and have found God together in life. A community that values itself on the

values of God: love, intimacy, security for all, personal contact, celebration in joyous times, and grace in difficult times- these are heart to heart connections that don't end because we walk out the door, but stay with each us in our hearts while we're away from each other because we are unified in our baptisms.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus calls his 12 apostles right before we hear him speak about what it means to live into the kingdom of God- where the hopeless will find hope, and the hungry and thirsty will be fulfilled, and those of us with all of those things reach out and share them with those who don't have them. It's a strong reminder that we're not alone in this journey- that, as we are each baptized in Christ's death, we are raised into Christ resurrection- a sure sign of the power of God's work in the world through each our many and unique gifts. We are chosen, and we're not chosen alone, we are surrounded by the holy ones, in unity of communion and fellowship.

We welcome Lydia into this powerful body of people by her baptism. She, like us, will carry on the traditions of our faith. In the last year, a time of great hostility, disrespect, and dismissiveness has ravaged our world. Holy living, as holy ones, is challenging and difficult when faced with the brokenness of others. But by being the body of the Christ we are shown a new and different way to respond to the world instead of react. Being gentle with ourselves, being gentle with others, reflecting compassion-

simple acts that become extraordinary because God is living and moving and breathing through us. Like 4 year old Norah, like the holy ones that came before us, and like the holy ones after us, we have the guide for how God manifests in the world.