

## November 4, 2018 All Saints Sunday

### Gospel: John 11:32-44

*Through the raising of Lazarus, Jesus offers the world a vision of the life to come, when death and weeping will be no more.*

<sup>32</sup>When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." <sup>33</sup>When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. <sup>34</sup>He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." <sup>35</sup>Jesus began to weep. <sup>36</sup>So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" <sup>37</sup>But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

<sup>38</sup>Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. <sup>39</sup>Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." <sup>40</sup>Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" <sup>41</sup>So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. <sup>42</sup>I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." <sup>43</sup>When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" <sup>44</sup>The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

### Second Reading: Revelation 21:1-6a

*Here is a vision of the new heaven and new earth in which God resides fully with God's people so that mourning, despair, and pain have been eradicated. These renewing words from the God who spans all of time are trustworthy and true.*

<sup>1</sup>I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup>And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

"See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them;

<sup>4</sup>he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away."

<sup>5</sup>And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." <sup>6a</sup>Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end."

This morning, on this All Saints Sunday, I would like to start with an image from the 14 chapter of Daniel. Now for those who are biblical scholars among us, you may quickly want to be raising your hands and say wait a minute my Bible only has twelve chapters on Daniel, what are you trying to do to us? Isn't there enough things being made up on all the political commercials I am watching on television right now and then I come here and hear the pastor talk about books of the Bible that do not even show up in my hard copy at home? Well actually, you would be correct there are only twelve books in the book of Daniel in most of our Bibles around the church and in your home. However, there exists other chapters, as well as other books, that are also recognized by the wider church as being important and have something to teach us about the faith, even though they are not in the canon of our Protestant Bibles. In fact, chapter 14 of Daniel is included in the Catholic Bible.

The story in this chapter concerns Daniel. If you recall the prophetic book Daniel is famous for the faithful not giving in to worship other false gods. The famous story of Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego is the one where they are thrown in the fiery furnace but remain unscathed. Then in chapter six, Daniel himself is placed in the lion's den because he is unyielding in his devotion to God. In the apocryphal 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of Daniel we have another story of this allegiance.

The summary of it basically goes like this. When Cyrus the Persian became the next king, Daniel was the most honored of all his friends. Now, the Babylonians had a temple built to honor an idol god called Bel, and every day they provided for Bel all kinds of food: twelve bushels of choice flour, forty sheep, and six measures of wine. The king revered Bel and went every day to worship it. But Daniel worshiped God. The new king notices

this and says to Daniel, "Why do you not worship Bel?" Daniel answers, "Because I do not worship idols made with human hands, but the living God, who created heaven and earth and has dominion over all living creatures." Cyrus says to Daniel, "You don't think that Bel is a living God? Do you not see how much he eats and drinks every day?" And Daniel laughs, and says, "Your majesty, do not be deceived, for this thing is only clay inside and bronze outside, and it never ate or drank anything." Then the king gets all angry, and he calls the priests of Bel and says to them, "If you do not tell me who is eating these provisions, you shall die. But if you prove that Bel is eating them, Daniel shall die, because he has spoken blasphemy against Bel." Daniel says to the king, "Let it be done as you have said." The priests also readily agree to this proposal. Now, there were seventy priests of Bel, not to mention their wives and children. So, the king goes with Daniel inside the temple of Bel with the priests and the offerings of the day. And the priests of Bel say, "Watch! We are now going outside the temple; You O majesty, you set out the food and the wine, you shut the door and seal it with your signet. And when you return in the morning, if you do not find that Bel has eaten everything, we will die; otherwise Daniel will die because he is telling lies." We are then told that the priests were not worried, because it turns out that beneath the temple they had made a secret tunnel entrance. They used to go in regularly through that tunnel and eat, consume or take all the provisions. So, after they go out, the king sets out the food for Bel. Then Daniel orders his servants to bring in ashes, and they scatter them throughout the whole temple in the presence of just the king alone. Then they all go out, shut the door and seal it with the king's signet, and depart. During the night the priests come as usual, with their wives and children, and they eat and drink

everything. Early in the morning the king gets up and comes to the temple with Daniel. The king says, "Are the seals unbroken, Daniel?" Daniel answers, "They are unbroken." And as soon as the doors are opened, the king looks in at the empty table, and shouts in a loud voice, "You are great, O Bel; and in you there is no deceit at all!" But Daniel laughs out loud again and restrains the king from going in. "Look at the floor!" he says, "and notice whose footprints those are." The king basically says, - wait a minute there are footprints all over the place and they are humans, men, women, and even children's. Then the king became enraged, and he arrested the priests and their wives and their children. They basically confess, and show him the secret doors through which they used to enter to eat what was on the table. Then the king has them all destroyed.

Pastor Hank Langknecht who used to be the professor of preaching at Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, before returning to the parish last year; once lifted up this story and said this: "The thing that kills me about this story is these priests. They know it's a lie. I mean, they know that the whole "Bel thing" - the temple, the table, the bread, the lamb, the wine all of it is not real. It's a false and they know it. All of them have ashes on the soles of their feet. But every day, they put on their albs, their stoles, and whatever other priestly paraphernalia they wear. Every day, they proceed out of the temple, and stand there while the people of Babylon bring: the bushels of choice flour and forty sheep and six measures of wine. Every day – the priests collect it. Every day – they take it into the temple; they offer it up to Bel. Every day – they set the table and arrange the food, and I'm guessing they make a big show of closing and sealing the temple doors, and then every night – they perpetrate the hoax. They sneak in with

their wives and children to consume everything. There they are the priests of Bel with ashes on the soles of their feet.

On this All Saints Sunday, we are reminded that as people of God, we are both saint and sinner. We are reminded that as we serve God, as we enter this sanctuary, all of us have ashes on our feet. In our lives, there are certain choices we have made, that demonstrate that sometimes we choose to think of God as an unknown dead idol, instead of making choices that reflect our belief in the living God of resurrection. We walk around with ashes on the soles of our feet because we know we get caught up in the rat race of the dog eat dog world, of those who die with the most toys wins, of participants in the culture of waste and consumerism. We knowingly and unknowingly become ensnared by the dangers of power, weapons of war, and privilege. We get ashes on our feet when we measure others by their job titles, the square footage of their homes, or the clothes that they wear. We get ashes on our feet when we think any human being is less than us, whether that is in regard to political affiliations, the country they were born in, the color of their skin or who they love. We get ashes on our feet when we do not speak up for right thing in the right moment. We get ashes on our feet when we think others have ashes all over their bodies because they do not see eye to eye with us. We get ashes on our feet when we think we do not have ashes on our feet.

This morning we remember those who have died in the faith before us: grandparents, parents, children, neighbors, relatives, coworkers, friends and those we sit with in pews. We particularly lift up those who have died in the faith since All Saints Sunday last year. Their impact on us makes a difference, their faith journey impacts our faith journey. This does not mean

they were perfect, because they too had ashes on their feet, but they now have been perfected with God's saving action.

It is because of the great empty tomb of God, because of a God who loves and accepts as we are, even as the Holy Spirit challenges us to change, that we are both sinner and saint in God's eyes. Sinner because we indeed have ashes on our feet, saint because God chooses to redeem us, sanctify us, forgive us and offer us a promise that supersedes our mortal living. "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more... I am the Alpha and the Omega." Amen.