Sermon for All Saints

November 8, 2021

 It’s been a crazy year.

 All of us have known pain and grief and sorrow this year. We share in the collective grief of this pandemic and the many ways it has affected our lives.

 On this All Saints day, we honor those who have gone on before us, placing our trust in the promises of God. But we can only place our trust in those promises once we have acknowledged our pain. So let’s just take a moment to allow ourselves to just sit with all that for a moment.

 One of my favorite church-y phrases is “foretaste of the feast to come.”

 And, at least in my mind, outside of Communion, nothing says “foretaste of the feast to come” quite like….cookie dough.

 I know. We’re not supposed to eat it. But ever since I was little, cookie dough has been this little bit of joy that I get to experience while I wait for cookies to bake. I rejoiced when I was allowed to lick the spoon Mom used to scoop out the cookie dough. It made waiting for the cookies easier, having given me that momentary glimpse of what the dough would become in the fullness of time.

 When we talk about Communion as a foretaste of the feast to come, it’s not just about the little bit of bread and wine or juice being like a nibble compared to the grand feast of all the saints. It’s about everything else that happens, too.

 When we gather around the table, no matter the time of year, we offer thanks and praise to God out of gratitude for all that God has done for us. We place our trust in the promises that the bread and wine are the body and blood of Christ, one of the ways that God offers grace to us.

 But in that moment, we get a glimpse of the way it will be when God’s plans for creation are fulfilled. Because when we gather around the table, we set aside all that divides us. In that moment, we know peace. We experience God’s grace. And we know abundance, because there is bread and wine for *all* people.

 In those precious moments when we gather around the table, we get a glimpse of the world as it will be one day, when weeping and mourning and death are no more, when all God’s children — the saints across all times and places — are gathered into one to lift up their praise of the One who created us all.

 That little bit of cookie dough left me wanting more, wanting the experience of the fully baked cookie.
 Gathering together to share Communion, that foretaste of the feast to come, should leave us wanting more. Longing for God’s plans for creation to come to fullness, so that the communion of saints across all times and places experiences God’s grace.

 While we place our trust in the promises of God, the promises that permeate our readings for today, while we wait with anticipation for the day when the entire communion of the saints is united, there is still the matter of our grief and sorrow in this life.

 Part of the Jewish tradition for mourning includes the daily recitation of the mourner’s Kaddish for 11 months after the death of a loved one. It is recited in a group of at least 10 people, not just as a reminder, but as an *insistence,* that no mourner is alone in their grief.

It’s a beautiful prayer. A portion of it goes like this: “Blessed and praised, glorified and exalted, extolled and honored, adored and lauded be the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, beyond all the blessings and hymns, praises and consolations that are ever spoken in the world; and the people say, Amen. May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for us and for all Israel; and the people say, Amen.”

In the mourner’s Kaddish, there’s no mention of death or grief or sorrow. The focus is on the majesty of God, the hopes of the people for the future, the promises of God to bring creation to fullness.

We can only pray this kind of prayer, day after day, month after month, when we trust that even in the midst of grief and sorrow, God is present. It is a prayer for better days ahead, pointing those who grieve to a future when all pain will be eased and life will be renewed. It is a prayer that trusts that we will know joy again.

Because in the midst of our darkest times, we need a reminder that there is light around us.

For us, as Christians, in the midst of our darkest times, we need a reminder that the Light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not, nor will it ever, overcome the Light.

And that reminder may well be the sharing of the meal around the table, the glimpse of God’s grace we receive there.

On this All Saints Day, when we lift up to God all those who have gone on before us, particularly those from the past year, we lift up our voices in praise and hope in the promises that we hear throughout the year. That the baby Jesus in the manger is Emmanuel, God-with-us. Who would grow up to become a teacher who showed us what God’s love in action looks like. And invited us to set down the worldly burdens we need not carry, so that we can know the abundant life God has in mind for us. And invited us to love as we have been loved. And then went to the cross to show us the depths of that love. And rose from the dead, as God defeated the powers of death.

On this day, we name our sorrows, we acknowledge them. We lift our communal grief to God, and we mourn all that causes suffering in the world ***together***. And we long ***together*** for God’s plans for creation to come to fulfillment.

On this day, I don’t call you to acts of service or try to offer you a new way to understand God’s Word. Instead, I simply encourage you to place your trust in God. To remember that we are not meant to be defined by our sorrow and grief and suffering, but by our hopes and our trust in God’s promises.

 For we are beloved children of God, named and claimed, gathered and sent to bear the love of God to the world. We are a part of the communion of saints across all times and all places.

 We who gather around this table share in the foretaste of the feast to come. Not just with each other, but with the whole church on earth.

 The glimpse we get of what *can be* when we gather around the table is the foretaste of the feast to come. It is a holy moment that is more fulfilling than any nibble of cookie dough could ever hope to be.

 Thanks be to God that we get to share this ***together***.