

This is our last Sunday in the Exodus series. Today we also celebrate All Saints' Day, even though it was technically on Nov. 1st. All Saints is a when we talk about that thin place that acknowledges how close the worlds between the living and the dead are, even when they seem piercingly far apart. All Saints is when we remember the saints- both the living and the dead- and allow the memory of their faith to inspire us on to deeper worship and greater service to the Lord. And in the Exodus story, there are some saints who inspire us in our faith. If you will remember, at the beginning of this sermon series, we talked about Joseph at the end of Genesis and how at the beginning of Exodus there was a new Pharaoh in town who didn't know Joseph. You remember Joseph, one of the twelve sons of Jacob/Israel, whose story links the ancestral promises given by God to Abraham to the Exodus story of oppression and liberation. Before he died Joseph made his brothers promise to carry his bones out of Egypt to Canaan- to the Promised Land (Gen. 50:25). At first this seemed like a strange request. "After all, by the time this request was fulfilled, the body of Joseph would have long since expired, and the bones of Joseph would be well on their way to dust. But such was the hope and insistence of Joseph at the end of his life" ([TableTalk Magazine](#)). This request was a public declaration of Joseph's faith that God would not only be with him always but that God would keep God's promise and deliver the Israelites out of Egypt unto the land which he swore to Abraham, Joseph's great grandfather, and to Isaac, his grandfather, and to Jacob, his father. When the time came for the Israelites to flee Egypt, Moses carried Joseph's dusty bones with him, thus fulfilling Joseph's last wishes. In the Book of Joshua, we're

told that Joseph's bones were placed in their final resting place in the land of Canaan (24:32). "Though the providence that brought God's promises to fruition was not always easy to bear, Joseph learned to hope beyond that which he currently embraced, and to believe in that which he could not yet see. That is, the hope of God's people is not longer life in the land of the dying, but eternal life in the land of heaven above. For the Israelites that hope was Canaan...the Promised Land. While Egypt was a land of bondage, cruelty, and death. It represented sin and its curse. For the people of Israel, Egypt was the land of their darkest hour. By contrast, Canaan represented redemption, freedom, and life. You see, Joseph had very little use for his bones; he knew that. But it was of utmost importance for him that his hope in the promises of God be actively and dramatically displayed" (*TableTalk*).

Still in the wilderness heading to Canaan, we're now at the very end of Exodus, and we're told that all is in order for the arrival of the glory of Yahweh in the tabernacle. Remember the tabernacle, God's dwelling place, the movable place of worship for God's people?! Moses and the people have been building it. The text says: "Moses did everything just as the Lord had commanded him. So Moses finished his work (v. 33). We don't find out until the Book of Deuteronomy that Moses also died before making it to the Promised Land. While we don't know the details surrounding Moses' death or where his bones are buried, we know these truths: God doesn't always explain all mysteries and as the Psalmist quotes, "Precious in the sight of the Lord / is the death of his faithful servants" (116:15). Regardless, Moses' hope and faith carried

him forward and today we reflect on these two saints and on the last paragraph in Exodus. Before we turn to God's word for us this day, let us first pray. **PRAY. READ Exodus 40:34-38.**

"The story of Exodus began with a people in servitude to an earthly king, it ends with a people in servitude to a Divine king. It began with a tale of darkness, misery and oppression, and closes with the brilliant illumination of God's glory" (Praeger, p 511). God's glory filled the tabernacle- the visible, institutional place of worship is a place of real presence. Life with a "real absence" is a world likely to be fraught with anxiety and to end in exhaustion and despair. Humans are marked by fragility, vulnerability and mortality – that is the truth of our lives. The reality of God's presence matters enormously – even though we have poor ways in which to speak about it. The very assurance of this text...of this exodus story...is that God abides, continually, reliably, enduringly. And the God who abides, **who stays**, is the God **who goes**, traveling with the Israelites at each stage of their journey. God's people are not sent alone out into the world. We're not alone for God dwells with us.

As some of you know I am a Presbyterian flavored Christian, and the denomination in which I am an ordained minister, I grew up learning the catechisms. Catechisms are structured in an orderly way to teach biblical truths by using a question and answer format. Many catechisms are geared toward the instruction of children. For example, take the question, "What is our hope in this life?" The Heidelberg Catechism has a wonderful way of summarizing and answering this in its first question:

“What is your only comfort in life and death?” Answer: “That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. A shorter answer would be, “In life and in death, we belong to God.”

We're told in this last paragraph of Exodus that God's glory filled the tabernacle—light during the day, cloud at night. **What is God's glory?** How do we explain it? This holy mystery wrapped in a riddle. Earlier in Exodus (33:18-23), Moses “presses the point and wants direct access to divine glory- that is, he wants to penetrate the mystery of God's being. But God only lets Moses see his ‘back,’ because the glory itself remains inaccessible and unseen” (Walter Brueggemann, *Delivered into Covenant*). Maybe God's glory is “the outward manifestation of the hand in its handiwork just as holiness is the inward? To behold God's glory, to sense God's style, is the closest you can get to God this side of Paradise, just as to read *King Lear* is the closest you can get to Shakespeare” (Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking*). Or what about the glory of God revealed in Jesus, the Messiah and Son of God, as we see in the beginning of the Gospel of John: *And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth (1:14)*. Or maybe God's glory has yet to be fully revealed due to war, evil, and all the isms in the world- the already but not yet? Or perhaps God's “glory’ is what people enter into when they die – that light people speak about? Because clearly in God's glory there is fullness and brightness. Perhaps the hymnist says it best.

Immortal, invisible, God only wise, In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,

*Most blessed, most glorious, the ancient of days,
Almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.
To all life thou givest, to both great and small;
In all life thou livest, the true life of all;
We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
And wither and perish but naught changeth thee.*

“Immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light inaccessible hid from our eyes.” Yes, God’s glory fills the tabernacle even if our understandings of what that looks like and means in our lives differ as we’re all caught up in the mystery of God. In both Joseph and Moses’ lives we witness their humanity and their faith. We also witness God’s love, presence, and care for them. Jewish philosopher, Eli Weisel, when reflecting on Moses’ death, says, “Then silently, God kissed his lips, **and the soul of Moses found shelter in God’s breath and was swept away into eternity.**” And we’re told in Deuteronomy that at the foot of the mountain, shrouded in fog, the children of Israel wept for Moses.

There’s a meme that I’ve seen for several years on All Saints’ Day, and I absolutely love it. It reads, “Suddenly all my ancestors are behind me. Be still,’ they say. Watch and listen. You are the result of the love of thousands.” I would also add...You are the result of a loving and dwelling God. In a moment, we will once again gather at Christ’s table for communion to remember God’s promises to always be with us and to commune with the saints. In our deaths, our baptisms are made complete yet it is not a final goodbye, as we shall gather together as saints of God at the river and around Christ’s table. Yes, All Saints’ Day

has as much to do with us as it does with the commemoration of those long gone. Today we stop and recognize how thin the veil is between life and death and to remember that the church includes all who have gone before us and now are glorified and all who will follow, and all who are yet to be born.

When reading about Joseph, Moses, and all the others in the Bible whom God chose, I figure that maybe there's nobody God can't use as a means of grace including even ourselves. We are saints, not because of our ability to be saintly but because of God's ability to work through 'Every saint has a past; every sinner has a future.' "In other words, the feet of saints are as much of clay as everybody else's, and their sainthood consists less of what they have done than of what God has for some reason chosen to do through them" (Buechner). Even Moses, that great prophet, started out having murdered someone and was afraid to speak in public. He met God, because he was called to be in a fellowship of the saints. And eventually he died on a mountaintop in the arms of God, sighed into God's life by God's very breath. His dust of a life, buried in the dust of the earth by the hands of the God that called and formed him. "For the record-*as you remember those you have loved this day*- no matter how you think death came to your loved one, no matter if you were at their side or a million miles away, no matter if it happened in one violent, unforgiving moment –or in a long painful farewell – this is how it really happened. They were kissed by God, they found shelter in God's breath and were swept away into the very glory of God –into the

brightness and fullness of the kingdom of life –into the church in heaven, the church triumphant” (Trish Gwinn).

“Who walked with you in a way that inspired and made possible the path that you travel? Remembering that in these days, the veil thins not only toward the past but also toward the future, how are you walking through this life in a way that will help make possible the paths of those who follow” (Jan L. [Richardson](#))? In the meantime, let us gather together and continue the journey in the community of saints. For, “It is as if those saints in glory carry something of us on their way as we assuredly carry something of them on our way. For...these people we have loved, are not just echoes of voices that have years since ceased to speak, but saints in the sense that through them something of the power and richness of life itself not only touched us once long ago, but continues to touch us still (Frederick Buchener, *The Sacred Journey*, quote of the day, 11/01/23).

At the end of many funerals or memorial services, I end with these words, “Although the person has left us for now, it is only for now. All that joy, love, peace, and generosity that characterized their personhood is not lost but is caught up in the mysterious, life-giving, life-keeping, expansive, loving, creative power and Glory of God in Jesus Christ.”

Saints, to be among one another, the living, and among the dead- gathered together in fellowship- is to become more alive in our faith. Like Joseph and Moses, let us live in hope and faith, trusting that God is always with us...tabernacling or dwelling among all the saints and revealing God’s glory. To God be the glory! Amen.