

Sermon – Isaiah 25:6-9; John 11:32-44
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Grace Lutheran Church
All Saints Sunday – Year B
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“Death Is Off the Menu”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name of God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. It turns out that I was wrong. Years ago in my first call, it fell to me to work with students to help them select their confirmation Bible verses. And there was always – every year – some smart aleck who would say, “Just give me the shortest verse.” To which I would reply, with not a little snark, “Fine. John 11:35. Go look it up.” A while later they’d come back and say, “Umm, yeah, I don’t think I want ‘Jesus wept’ as my Bible verse.” And I’d say, “I didn’t think so. So, if you don’t want to make Jesus cry even more, why don’t you give this a little more thought?” But I was wrong! John 11:35 is the shortest verse in the King James Version of the Bible, but *not* in the original Greek. Shorter yet is 1 Thessalonians 5:16: “Rejoice always.” And the shortest? Well, that’s Luke 20:30, which reads, in full, “then the second.” I’ll let you look it up to figure out the context, but for now, the next time someone tries to tell you that John 11:35 is the shortest verse in the New Testament, you can reply, quite correctly, that “‘Jesus wept’ comes in third, ‘then the second’ comes in first.” People will be in awe of your biblical wisdom! Of course, I was wrong about something else the whole time. For while Jesus no doubt wishes that adolescent Lutherans paid more attention to the written Word of God, I’m sure he’s just happy the kids are there. Not to mention that he already has plenty of reasons to weep.
2. On this All Saints Sunday, we go to the tomb of Lazarus with Jesus. And Jesus weeps. For Lazarus, who is dead. For Martha and Mary, who are broken-

hearted. For this whole creation, that groans under the weight of sin and death. On this All Saints Sunday, Jesus weeps with us as we remember our blessed dead, including those from our congregation who died this year: Sue, Irene, Vic, Nancy, Constance, June, Mim, Stephen, Laverne, Donette, Michael, Carlos, Marion, Harold, Eleanor, Paul, and Carol, and all the beloved saints whose names we hold in our hearts. On this All Saints Sunday, Jesus weeps for a creation that groans still under sin's power and death's dominion. Jesus weeps at murders in synagogues and at racist graffiti at Oak Park and River Forest High School. Jesus weeps over the spirit of hate that has arisen in our midst. Jesus weeps, and how could Jesus not? Jesus loves us, you and me and this whole creation. Looking upon the world, why wouldn't he weep?

3. Jesus, God on this earth, weeps with and for us. And there is power in his tears, but if the story ended there, it would be cold comfort. It is, however, most decidedly *not* where the story ends. Jesus walks up to the tomb, and with a boom in his voice he calls, "Lazarus, come out!" And Lazarus could no more stay in that tomb that a ready-to come-out baby could stay in the womb. He has no choice in the matter, and neither does death. When Jesus says rise, you rise! When Jesus says rise, death dies.
4. Can you imagine the celebration that erupted in Mary and Martha's household? Oh, sure, the chief priests and the Pharisees had seen enough. Raising the dead? Well, we can't have that; time to put that blasphemer down. But while the powers that be insist on talking about death – as the powers that be always do – can you imagine the party that was unfolding? This is fatted calf territory, and images of Isaiah, of feasts with meaty marrow and fine wine, no doubt came to mind. For Jesus had just swallowed up death; now it was their turn to eat!
5. The vision of Isaiah and the raising of Lazarus, run through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, yield the vision we see in Revelation: a new

heaven and a new earth; a new holy city; a bride adorned for her husband at the consummation of creation. And God will be there, with them, with us, making all things new. And with parental tenderness, God will bend down – this same God who came in Christ to cry with us – God will bend down and wipe every tear from our eyes. For the battle that is already won now in Christ will finally be over. New creation will begin. Not just life in heaven, but a new creation for all creation!

6. God in Christ, John tells us, is restoring, recreating both heaven and earth. Jesus, you see, has not come simply to save our souls from this broken world and spirit us away to the next. Jesus has bigger things in mind, for Jesus weeps over it all. And Jesus wants it all back. To restore it to God for God's original purposes. And if the reign of God includes heaven and earth, that means that both heaven and earth matter now, here, today. As people of the resurrection promise, we do not turn from this world and hope for the next; we take comfort and hope from the next and turn with these gifts toward this world. It's similar to what our Jewish friends call *tikkun olam*, the healing of the world. And it's what the world needs in these days. Many of us gathered for Shabbat at West Suburban Temple Har Zion this past Friday to worship and to stand in solidarity with our Jewish friends in the wake of last weekend's murders at Tree of Life. We sang psalms and prayers, hurling them against the darkness, reminding ourselves that we are people of **life** and **hope** and **love**, *not* death and fear and hate. We are, to quote Rabbi Glick, meant to be spiritual revolutionaries, the vast people of God committed to God's eternal Sabbath vision of justice, peace, and love. And if we, as Christians, are going to say that we believe in the resurrection, than spiritual revolutionaries are what we simply must be. For if Jesus loved someone, anyone, enough to die for them that they might live, so too must we then live for them in this life, in this world. Christ has died and been raised to redeem this world. The vision of his final victory is secure. And in between, well, there is work for us to do – acting in God's name and by the Spirit's power –

to stand and work as **all** the saints on behalf of **all** people in all the world; not just certain people who look a certain way in certain parts of the world. That is how we live *tikkun olam*. That is how we celebrate life in the face of death. That is how we live out the victory of Jesus Christ.

7. So on this All Saints Sunday, as we bring forward our personal and communal grief; as we reflect upon this world's uncertainty and violence; what is the proper response? A party. A song. We celebrate! Give thanks for the witness of the saints who have shown us the way. Rejoice! Dig deep into the meal set before you, the richness of Christ's body and the well-aged wine of his blood. Live! Live as the people of God, in the mission of God, for the sake of God's world. And take comfort. Jesus came to weep so that you would learn to laugh. Jesus came to die so that you would learn to live. Like Lazarus before you, you have been unbound. You didn't even have a say in the matter. Christ has called you out of the tomb. Why live like you're still in there? Live in the light, and work to make it brighter. For Jesus wept, then Jesus won. Amen.

And now may the peace that passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.