

Sermon for All Saints Sunday

Pastor Mike Schuessler

Text: Isaiah 26: 20-21

“Go, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until his wrath has passed by. See, the LORD is coming out of his dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins. The earth will disclose the blood shed upon her; she will conceal her slain no longer.”

On All Saints Day we pause to think about people who have gone before us into heaven. We remember that they died. Do you think death a good thing or a bad thing? A hymn in our hymnal describes death as “kind and gentle”. For the prodigal son, death could not come soon enough to take his father and provide him with his inheritance. Death may release a loved one from the pain and suffering of this world and gives family and friends a reason to take time out of their busy schedules to gather together for the funeral. Death seems to be a good thing.

Yet, the Bible is clear that death was not part of God’s original plan for his creation. Adam and Eve were not created to die. Rather, death entered the world through sin. The supposedly kind and gentle death of a loved one is intimately connected to both the suffering that led up to it and to the pain that we feel when a loved one is ripped from the fabric of our daily lives. The pain is even greater for those who do not know what awaits them on the other side of the valley of the shadow of death. Have we done enough to earn eternal life?

In our Old Testament reading, Isaiah seems to speak harsh words of judgment to God’s people. He tells them to hide as God’s wrath passes by. The LORD is intent upon punishment. Things that are hidden will come to light. It is true that God’s people, both then and now, have sinned. The Bible does tell us of God’s righteous anger on account of human sinfulness and warns of a day of judgment. But at this point God wants to comfort his people. The first sentence reminds us of the

Israelites in Egypt during the tenth plague. God’s people hid inside their dwellings as God’s wrath passed over those doors that had been marked with the blood of the lamb that was slain. The comfort of the second sentence has been hidden by our English translation of the original Hebrew. It should say,

“See, the LORD is coming out of his dwelling to punish the one person who dwells on the earth for the sins of everybody.”

Isaiah is foretelling the good news that God himself would come down from heaven to become that one person who would be punished for our sins. Next month we’ll listen once again as an angel tells Joseph that he should give Mary’s baby the name Jesus, “because he will save his people from their sins.” His cousin explains that Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. It is this sacrificial lamb that is put to death on the cross. The blood of this lamb, shed upon the hill outside Jerusalem, enables God’s wrath to pass over us.

When Jesus died, our sins were paid for. The curtain in the temple that separated the presence of God from his people was torn in two. God now welcomes us into his presence. We know that when we die, our souls will go to heaven. God in his mercy works all things for our good. Though death is our enemy, Jesus brings life out of death. And not just for our souls. Through Isaiah God promised that “Your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy! The earth will conceal her slain no longer.”

Jesus rose bodily from the dead. Thomas could touch him! The Gospel of Matthew says that when Jesus died “the tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of their tombs, and after Jesus’ resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people. This joyful reunion was a foretaste of the feast to come, and we wait for the day when we will, with both body and soul, be together with Jesus and our loved ones forever. Amen.