

Sermon: Healing waters  
All Saints Sunday, Year B  
Rev. 21:1-6a, John 11:32-44

Shelby Ochs Owen  
Emmanuel Church, Staunton  
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Back when our children were small and one of them had a birthday, my mother-in-law would always give the birthday child a lovely gift. And she would give the two children *not* having the birthday little gifts as well. She called the little gifts “cry-baby” presents! I suppose it was to keep them happy too. Aside from spoiling them a bit, the practice did keep them from crying. Did you notice we have a lot of people crying in the Scripture readings for today? Revelation’s audience is crying; in the Gospel of John, Mary, Lazarus’ sister, is crying, and Lazarus’ Jewish friends are crying. Even Jesus is crying! What is going on here?

Maybe the writers of Scriptures are trying to connect with us. They know that part of the human condition is that sometimes we will find ourselves deeply grieved or disappointed with the difficulties of life, and we find ourselves in pain –physical, or emotional, psychological or spiritual pain. This is a reality of life. In one comic I saw this week, it showed a disturbed patient and his doctor in the examining room. The doctor says, “Here’s your problem – it looks like you’re paying attention to what’s going on.” If we pay attention to what is going on – watch the news, read the paper, talk to our neighbors, listen to our family members, if we really engage, we learn that life can be incredibly fraught with worry over finances, broken relationships, addiction, depression, anxiety or a lack of meaning or purpose. Sometimes we have reason to cry. And sometimes crying can be good. Tears can communicate things to us that words cannot.

The Celtic Christians in the British Isles sometime referred to certain places as “thin places”, where the veil between life on earth and life in heaven seems awfully thin. They are places where we become aware of some deeper aspect of the reality of God. Last Sunday our speakers Elaine, Julie and Krissy shared with us their journey to the islands of Iona and Lindisfarne, two such thin places. But there are other places that can be considered thin places that aren’t so far away as England or Scotland. Maybe for you this sanctuary is a thin place. I often hear people say they cry when they come into this space and they aren’t even sure why. I also often hear people who are grieving a death, or grieving a broken marriage say they just can’t come to church right now, that it’s just too difficult, too emotionally charged and they don’t want to burst out crying for all the world to see.

But today’s passage from Revelation, one which is often read at funerals, reminds us that God himself will lead his people beyond their tears; “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more. See I am making all things new.” God takes us through and beyond our tears to a new place of transformation.

Right here, right now and in the future, we don’t and we won’t face the difficulties alone but with faith that God is with and will always be with us. We celebrate the thin places of life today

on All Saints Sunday, as we remember those loved ones, those saints who have died and gone on to the Greater Life with God, the ones who are indeed part of that “great cloud of witnesses” of the love of God in Jesus. We could view All Saints Sunday as a kind of mystical family reunion, where we are reminded of our roots and made aware we are part of a greater body of faith, some we see now and others we see no longer.

Today we will baptize Jasper William Glover. Jasper has the distinct honor of being the first in the fourth generation to be baptized at Emmanuel. He follows his great-grandmother Alma, baptized here in 1918, his grandfather Bill and grandmother Margaret, and his father John Glover. He is one in a great line of faithful, devoted Emmanuelites. I imagine they will all be seated at the Eucharistic table this day. Can we imagine all of our loved ones seated at the table or even standing at the table? Here in this church on earth, we can visibly see those of us still on our earthly pilgrimage, folks like Tidge and Doug, Wallace and Saskia, Teresa and Colin. But also seated at the table are those who have gone on to the Greater Life with God, Maury Hester, Jo Lotz, Kit Carter, Pam Lott, just to name a few. They are not far away, even though they are no longer here on earth in body. There is a very thin veil that separates us. God’s love refuses to stay in boxes or in the lines we are tempted to draw between life and death. No one can hold back a tide as powerful as love.

When we think of those whom we love but see no longer, maybe it’s o.k. to cry. Maybe when we weep we are actually closer to God. Perhaps in our vulnerability of having our hearts cracked open we encounter the holy in a more direct, pure, and profound way? Someone once described tears to me as “healing waters.” And healing suggests we are being made new.

In a few minutes, after the reading of the names of those who have died, we will have the opportunity to light candles in memory of loved ones who have died and have gone on to the Greater Life. As you think about those who have gone on before you, your beloved family members and friends, maybe even those you grieve the loss of but didn’t even know such as the 11 Jewish worshippers at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburg, imagine them completely healed and fully whole before God. What would they be saying to you now? Perhaps the Father who gave you such a hard time here on earth, would be saying, “I am proud of you.” Or maybe your child you lost would be saying, “don’t worry mom and dad, I am more than o.k.” Or maybe the Jewish elders would be saying to us, “don’t let hatred win; shine your light of love with all you have.”

God’s desire is for us to be whole. If tears can make us open to God’s healing love, then we must let the healing waters flow. Let them flow, let them flow. Through the healing waters, God is making all things new.

Amen.