



ST. MICHAEL'S SERMONS

Greenville, SC

All Saints Sunday – November 5, 2006

John 11:32-44

“SAINTS IN LIGHT”

The First Grade Sunday School Class took a field trip to the church's worship space. There stood the six year olds, washed in the light and the color of those magnificent men and women depicted in their church's stained glass windows. “Mrs. Miles, Mrs. Miles, who are all those people?” “They're saints! Who can tell me what a saint is?” “I know! I know!” said one little girl. “Saints are people who let the light shine through!”

Well, that is certainly true of Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And that is certainly true of the saints you and I remember with thanksgiving to God this All Saints Sunday, 2006: Madeline! Skip! Frances! My parents. Your parents. Two of my sisters-in-law. My saints and your saints. We remember them because they have died, and live now with Christ! But the content of our remembering is their living, and their loving, and their servicing. Indeed! They are for us people who let the light of Christ shine through! That's how they came to be saints for us.

Now, there are no magnificent men and women depicted in the stained glass windows of our worship space Just ordinary colors, and ordinary shapes, fit together in a none-the-less extraordinary way. It was the style of the times. It matches the architecture of the space. But it is also just like us! Ordinary men, ordinary women, ordinary saints, fit together in God's great design into the extraordinary organism of Christ's Church! And so this stained glass makes a strong statement about who we are, and whose we are, and how it is that we come to be saints, ordinary saints, human saints, sinful saints, “in bondage to sin,” yet saints none-the-less, not just saints dead, but saints alive.

I am holding here a small prism. All of us remember them from school. A prism bends the light, breaks the light apart, so that the light separates into each of its different colors, and makes a rainbow. All the colors together make white – white light, pure light, Christ's light! But when a piece of glass is red or blue or yellow, it is that color because it blocks out all the other colors, and lets only the red or the blue or the yellow light get through.

And we are just like that! Saints in light! We saints are just like that! Ordinary saints. Human saints. Sinful saints. Your saints and my saints. Saints above *with* Christ. And you and me – saints below – *in* Christ! Because we keep so much of the light out, because of our selfish frailties and sinful failings, the light we do let in becomes all the more beautiful! Indeed – it is in the bent and bruised and broken places that the Light of Christ shines most clearly in us and through us. And that's the Good News of God's Gospel for us!

This All Saints Sunday celebrates the presence and the power of the Crucified and Risen Christ among us! With us! Shining through us! The Church lives precisely in that place depicted in this morning's Gospel text: Jesus IS the resurrection and the life. Jesus stands here among us. Yet death still happens Lazarus is dead Mary's challenge is our challenge. Jesus' response to Mary is Jesus' response to us. “Take away the stone!” “Lazarus, come out!” “Take away the stone!” “Lazarus, come out!”

And there is the Church, the communion of saints, gathered around the One who is the resurrection and the life, as Lazarus comes out – and death is destroyed, and life is restored, and the light shines in the darkness. There is the Church! Gathered around the living, life-giving Word of God. Lazarus, come out! Robert, come out! St. Michael's, come out! And Jesus says to the Church: "Unbind him!" Unbind each other! And let them go! This is the true work of saints. This is when the light truly shines through us. As we enable each other to claim and to live in the gift Christ has already given us through His Cross and His Resurrection.

This All Saints celebration is in fact Easter in November. Just as Winter chills us and nature begins to die around us, we hear the "distant triumph song," and the Church reminds us of the living Word of God, and the true work of saints, and gives us again our mission statement for life and ministry as God's Own Saints in Light!

Those of us who lead worship each Sunday are able to see throughout the liturgy the large stained glass window which shines over the people of God in this place. Ordinary shapes, ordinary colors, each piece beautiful, but the whole far greater than the sum of the parts. It is a symbol for us, the People of God, Christ's Own Church. A single arrow, pointing upward to the glory of God in Christ. A broad expanse reaching down shining the light of Christ into this place. Look up at it each time you leave this place to serve Christ in the world.

This Gospel text ends the first half of John's Gospel; the second half of John's Gospel ends with the empty tomb and the Risen Christ and the folded grave clothes. And here we stand today, the communion of saints, between the bound up grave clothes of Lazarus which he no longer needs, and the folded grave clothes of Jesus which He no longer wears. Jesus Is Risen! And we shall arise! Saints in Light. Indeed.

Unbind each other! And let's go . . . !

AMEN