



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

THE REV. LINZI STAHLECKER, CURATE
ALL SAINTS' SUNDAY: PROPER 27, NOVEMBER 6, 2022
DANIEL 7:1-3,15-18; PSALM 149; EPHESIANS 1:11-23; LUKE 6:20-31

SEPARATED IN SPACE, INSEPARABLE IN THE SPIRIT

Luke 6:20-31 [Jesus looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets. "But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you."]

Making sense of time and space has presented problems for people throughout human history. Whether perceived as absolute, or relative, the way time and space are internalized varies actually from culture to culture. For English-speakers like me, or

speakers of other languages that are written from left to right, if we're asked to visualize a series of events, we'll imagine a timeline that starts in the past on our left, and runs through to a future that goes off to our right, just like the written word. Hebrew and

Arabic speakers, who write from right to left, imagine a timeline that runs in the opposite direction ... and there's an indigenous community in Australia for whom cardinal direction, compass bearing, is central to the way they organize reality. For them, the past is imagined on a timeline which always begins in the east, moving off into a future in the west.¹

We humans have learned to organize and make sense of it all in all kinds of different ways!

I'm thinking about this today because this Feast of All Saints is a marker on our liturgical timeline. It is a marker, a point in time, in which we are particularly mindful of all who have died; this marker orients us to our world around us, and to the larger history in which our world sits, and it orients us within our own stories which tell of those we have lost, and how long we have been without them. As I think of my own timeline this morning, I see many markers, points

in time at which people in my life have died. Those I've lost most recently: just to my left. Then, going on, and further back into my childhood I see the lives of others marked, and further on still: others. There are markers on this imagined timeline of mine beyond the beginning of my own life even, further away and into the years and decades and centuries that have preceded me. It's a loooong imagined timeline, and it covers quite the distance!

Yet, on days like today, that great distance, that separation between those marked dates, between me and the people on my timeline, the separations/the distance it just doesn't feel useful. And so I allow the distance to dissolve, instead inviting into my understanding something of an eternal present in which all who have been, and all of us who are, in some sense 'co-exist.' Although separated in the space, we are inseparable in the Spirit. And I can sense the ineffable joy in

¹see <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-language-shapes-thought/> and

<https://hiddenbrain.org/podcast/watch-your-mouth/>

that, I can feel *the great love* held in that.

My internalized timeline is a super-useful way for me navigate my physical, material experience, but I don't believe it's the best way for me to honor the actual fullness of my life, which absolutely includes the abundance of my spiritual reality. Spiritual reality can be all too easily confined/limited by our language conventions and a materially focused, and so narrow description of the world we live in. Material things, objects, are easily organized, separated, but our lives and the lives of others are not objects.

There is no possible measurable distance, no possible observable separation between any of us and God, so ... may we allow moments such as this, markers of time such as this one, to fire up our creativity! The spiritual separation between us and those we've loved and see no longer does not increase as time passes, and days such as this prompt us to allow those

imagined separations to dissolve. As we speak the spiritually expansive and descriptive words of prayer and liturgy, we articulate together a truth that defies our practiced cultural conventions – this life is not an entirely material thing, it is not an object to be tidily organized in space and time.

Right before the gospel reading we just heard, the writer of Luke tells us that Jesus came down and stood on a level place² with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people. To teach us, Jesus uses his whole self,

he moves his body to ensure he is amongst all the people, dissolving those imagined separations that had arisen as ways of organizing society through the use of distance: organizing people's lives by power, by class, by nation, by difference – putting some together, and placing distance between/separating others. Jesus uses his own body to teach us that *these* separations also are arbitrary, learned,

² Luke 7:17

and he calls us to learn and to practice a different way, His Way.

Shortly, we'll gather around the font, on a level place, *all* of us together. Those in the room, and those we carry in our hearts, in our memories, that great Cloud of Witnesses. As we open ourselves to God's presence, and to one another, we practice here letting go of our learned ways of placing distance between us, of imagining/of using distance as a way of organizing the world around us and our experience of living within it. We practice here letting go of the separations we impose on the world,

that we perpetuate through our systems and our conventions and our habits. In this place we are made through Baptism as *one*, one inseparable communion, in this glorious and mystical body of Christ.

In a few moments, on that level place, all of us together, we will welcome these beloveds into *that* reality where nothing, neither death, nor life ... nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else, in all creation .. where nothing separates us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.³ Amen.



SAINT MARK'S
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL

³ from Romans 8:38-39