

**THE WORK OF THE SAINTS OF GOD**  
Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost  
November 3, 2024

This morning's reading from the Wisdom of Solomon brings us words of comfort for the lives we live here on earth, and comfort in our times of grief as we remember our loved ones who have died. It says: "the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God." These should be words of comfort if we remember that our God is not the harsh judgmental deity many of us have been told about, but the pure and infinitely loving God who writes our names on his hand and shelters us under his wings. Then the writer of Wisdom makes a surprising statement about the souls of those who have died: "In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died." It's that word "seemed" that is a shocker. He is saying that to the people who are foolish, those who have died, SEEM to have died. Well, have they died, or haven't they? Death and life. We all know that there is an impenetrable divide between the two. Or is there? Today, having just come through Halloween, All Souls Day, and All Saints Day, is a good time to explore these deep mysteries and the impact this may have on our lives.

This past Thursday was Halloween. For several days while driving through my neighborhood I saw spooky ghosties and goolies on visible display. A couple of them were funny, but most were a bit scary. A week earlier as we were looking forward to Halloween, our church held a dinner and storytelling event where everyone was encouraged to bring a personal scary story to share. Several of our parishioners did so, sharing their own unique spinetingling story from beyond the grave. Some of those stories had to do with a famous individual. Others were encounters with a beloved relative who had died. What were they seeing? Maybe there isn't always an impenetrable divide between life and death as we seem to think. Each person's story was very interesting, and one could even say, a bit eye-

opening. It causes us to think that there may be more to what we consider “real” than what we often think of. So, what is going on in these encounters from the beyond? Well, here’s my short answer to this mystery. I haven’t a clue! Well, no, that’s not quite accurate. I do have some thoughts on the matter, and it relates to the Wisdom authors statement that the souls of the righteous only “seemed” to have died.

Today, on this celebration of All Saints Day, we remember the saints down through the ages, and our many loved ones who have died, some of whose pictures are on our table of remembrance. This is a good time to talk about our deceased loved ones in more than just some abstract, faith based, distant way, by saying something like, well, now she’s with God. Or, well, thankfully he is now beyond suffering. Although I believe these statements to be true, they don’t even come close to telling the whole story that is more meaningful and present and immediate and personal and intimate. A story that connects all of us. The longer I live, and the broader the subject matters that I have read, and the more I have experienced, and the more stories people have shared with me – many from those who were nearing the end of their physical earthly journey – I have come to believe that these great mysterious encounters are sometimes revealed to us by our five senses; taste, touch, smell, sight, and hearing.

Without these senses, we would not be able to “see” that strange floating white orb, or “feel” a sudden breeze in a closed room, or “smell” the fragrance of our deceased loved one’s favorite perfume. Without these senses, we would not have these encounters with the beyond – or would we? You see, there is at least one more sense beyond the five that we may want to consider; one more way of knowing reality that we usually don’t talk about.

There is something that may be called a sixth sense, a more intuitive level of awareness that is available to every one of us. This sixth sense is known by some people more than others. Although not being one of our normal five senses, this sixth sense can work in conjunction with the other five, or be separate from the other five. For example, we might feel an unusual breeze, but not see it as anything more than a strange breeze. Or, someone might get – a sixth sense – a strange feeling or sense of some presence nearby, just before their sense of smell picks up a particular familiar fragrance.

Some people seem to naturally have a gift for this sixth sense. Many people do not believe in it. But most of us have the possibility of developing this intuitive sense to a degree through various meditative and contemplative practices. Beyond what we can discern through the limits of our natural human perceptions, science is sometimes able to take things a step or two further through the invention of technologies that pick up more of the electromagnetic spectrum, or hear sounds much more acutely. But still with all these human and non-human tools at our disposal, there is still a great mystery surrounding the meaning of death and what it means for someone to be “present” to us. These conversations often move from the realm of science to the areas of philosophy and religion.

Every human being is capable of having encounters with that which is beyond their five senses. And these encounters, this awareness, is much more normative among people who live in the east, and among many indigenous people. If you were to speak to many of these individuals, they would tell you that there is really no divide between the transcendent and temporal, that all things in the universe are in some ways interconnected.

I found this out several years ago in a conversation with a chaplain friend of mine. Some of you have probably heard this story. She told me that a few

decades ago she, along with other westerners had signed up for a trip to the deep jungles of Peru. (RELAY THE STORY)

Beyond the limits of our natural perceptions and the realm of scientific possibility, there is still a great mystery that surrounds life and death and what it means for someone to be gone, and yet still “present” to us.

The scriptures speak to us of the multitude of saints and martyrs; this “great cloud of witnesses” that surround us, and yet they remain unseen to us. Although unseen, they still influence our lives. Their strength and faithfulness become our strength and faithfulness. Their values become our values. Even closer to home, our faith community that worships and serves at Good Shepherd, have been influenced by those disciples of Jesus who have gone before us. We are the benefactors of their faith and service and offering and devotion. You and I would not be meeting in this church if it were not for their sacrifice. This places a responsibility on each of us as well to do our part in strengthening each other’s faith, expanding the reign of God; not so much for our own benefit, but for the benefit of the generations who will come after us.

So, when I talk about the living and the dead and time and space and what is “real,” or not, we might just want to open ourselves up to an expanded vision of reality. That the saints and those who have died may just be a bit more present to us than we ever realized.