

All Saints Sunday

Dan. 7: 1-18 Ps. 150 Eph.1:11-23 Lk. 6:20-31

A sermon given by Pastor Elaine Hewes

St. Brendan Episcopal Church Nov. 2, 2025

I need to begin my sermon this morning by reading what I wrote in my journal this past Friday morning... I wrote,

"I have a sermon to write for All Saints Sunday, and usually I love this annual task because it asks me to enter the geography of death and loss and grief and to search there for something to hold onto- something as small as a snippet of a melody or a smooth stone... a sliver of moon or a white feather..."

"Usually I love entering the geography of All Saints Sunday because it asks me to do the 'preacher version' of a collage artist; which is to say, searching the territory of sorrow and death for pieces of broken, torn, abandoned, tear-drenched scraps of various materials, and along with the lessons, the hymns and the liturgy of the day, to arrange and rearrange all the pieces until something like that 'sliver of moon' or that 'snippet of melody' begins to appear, giving me, the preacher, something to hold up for worshippers on All Saints Sunday to see – something they can hold onto in the loss and grief of their own lives..."

"But this morning," as I wrote in my journal on Friday morning, "as I think about how I've loved entering the geography of All Saints Sunday as a preacher for almost three decades, I realize that my entrance into

that strange and disorienting land has been largely theoretical... an 'exercise in artistry'... While this year, having lost a brother-in-law, my father and my husband to death in less than five months, it feels like an entrance into a geography with nothing but raw broken pieces of grief to use in my All Saints Collage, leaving me wondering what I could possibly say come Sunday morning for anyone to hold on to, including myself..."

So that's what I wrote in my journal on Friday morning... realizing gradually, over the course of the morning, after some time of weeping, and washing dishes, and vacuuming, and watching the wind strip the oak trees of their leaves... Realizing gradually that I would have to rely on someone other than myself to bring materials to this morning's All Saints collage if we are to catch a glimpse of the promises that live and move and have their being at the heart of All Saints Day...

And who better to invite into such collage-making, I thought, than some saints who have come to me in the past months, inviting me to see what I could not see... (a saint, by the way, being someone either living or dead who helps you sense the possibility of something so beautiful and true and real and "gasp" it raises your head, breaks open your heart, and frees you to move again, no matter how uncertain the way ahead may be...).

So, with that definition of a saint in mind, I decided to invite three saints to participate in the creation of our All Saints Collage this morning, bringing with them pieces for our collage that speak to the deepest meaning of the day...

The first saint being my father, along with the gift he brought me just eight hours before his death this past March... A gift I've spoken of before, but which I need to speak of again, partly because it's so central to the meaning of All Saints Day and partly because it's been something I've held onto with all my might these past five months...

So it was March 11th... I was in Maine and my father was in St. Charles, Illinois. He'd been ill for a long time, and I'd had a call from my sister that evening saying our father would probably not make it through the night...

So I went to bed quite unable to sleep, but finally drifting off about 2:00 in the morning... And sometime after that I had a vision... A vision in which I found myself inside my father's body, looking out of his eyes, seeing what he was seeing... And what I saw was a vast expanse of light... a space filled with such a sense of light and such a feeling of unconditional grace and love it filled me with joy beyond comprehension or articulation...

About eight hours later my father died... And after pondering this experience for some time, I've come to believe that he was showing his seminary-trained, academically-oriented, metaphorically-saturated daughter, who was not, up until that night, all that apt to give much credence or thought to a "place" called heaven... I have come to believe my father was showing me what he was seeing as he was transitioning from this life to the next...

The very same thing the author of Ephesians in our second lesson for this morning was trying to get his readers to see... namely a future time and place in which all of God's beloved children would be gathered

in the fullness of God's love... All of God's creation connected like stars in the vast constellation of God's grace...

My father showing me also what I had not been able to see before... a future time and place in which those who had loved one other in this life would know one another in love again...

My father's contribution to our All Saints collage this morning offering a glimpse of this promise... a promise, as I said, that I now hold onto with all my might...

The second saint I would invite to this morning's collage-making is someone I encountered on Sand Beach in Stonington the Monday after Michael's memorial service in late September...

So, after having had more than forty out-of-town friends and relatives for the weekend, on that Monday morning there were just four left, including Michael's brother Tom and his wife Audrey from Oregon, and dear friends of ours from Milwaukee; neither of those places being "lobster-havens," leading me think it would be a fine idea to get lobsters for dinner from the Co-op, going first by way of Sand Beach...

It was a beautiful fall day, and I expected there to be many people enjoying the beauty of that favorite stretch of shoreline. But when we arrived I was surprised to find no one there... leaving that place of such exquisite beauty just to us...

We all went off on our own, walking the beach or sitting on the rocks... all of us needing some quiet time to hold the emotions of the previous few days.... After a while our friend Jon, noticing we needed to leave in order to get to the Co-op before it closed, called us all together,

suggesting we take a “selfie” of the group with the beauty of the ocean behind us...

And no sooner were these words out of his mouth when we heard a voice from behind the bushes separating the beach from the parking lot say, “I’ll take the picture for you.” And out from behind the bushes walked a man with a sheriff’s uniform on...

As he walked closer I noticed the tattoos that ran down his arm, and I looked more closely at his face, and I recognized him to be the Hancock County sheriff who responded to my 9-1-1 call on the day Michael died... The sheriff who had been so tender with me in the trauma of the moment... the sheriff who, along with his partner and the folks from the funeral home, had gotten Michael ready to leave our home, and carried him to the hearse...

When the sheriff got to the place at Sand Beach where we were standing I told everyone that this was the sheriff who had been present on the day Michael died, and I told them how reverently and beautifully he had tended to both Michael and myself... I told the sheriff that the group assembled in front of him included Michael’s brother and sister-in-law and dear friends...

He expressed his condolences and shook everyone’s hand... Each person in turn expressing their gratitude for the tender care he had given Michael and me that day... He looked at me and asked me how I was doing in a way that made me feel as if there was a bond between us that could never be broken...

And really, I can’t quite put it into words, but it felt like an angel had come into our midst... because what are the chances that our little group of Michael-mourners and the very sheriff who responded to my

9-1-1 call would end up on Sand Bech on the same day at the same time, with no one else in sight? ...

This angel or saint seeming to me to be someone from the “other world” inside this one... Someone come to remind us that if we are open enough and empty enough to receive hints and guesses of God’s presence (Love’s presence) in our midst, in the ordinary, earthy, sometimes grief-stricken moments of our lives, we will find that Sacred presence there, here, with us in every here and every now... present tense... just waiting for our heads to lift, our hearts to break open, and our eyes to see...

That Hancock County Sheriff (whose last name by the way is “Lord”... leading my Buddhist sister-in-law Audrey to exclaim after we had parted company from him, “Well, the Lord certainly visited us today!”)... That Hancock County Sheriff bringing to our All Saints Day collage this morning the reminder that the fullness of God’s love, still waiting to be realized, is always breaking into the present-tense moments of our lives...

Another promise for me to hold onto in the midst of loss and grief and sorrow...

And lastly, not a single saint, but a whole host of them, both living and dead, gathered last weekend at the Riverside Cemetery in Farmington, Connecticut to commend Michael’s brother Chase into the mighty arms of God and to place his urn, with his ashes, in the Hewes family mausoleum that held generations of Hewes’s who had gone before...

About 45 people showed up for the service, in large part to remember and honor Chase, but also because the mausoleum which held their loved ones had been newly renovated and was on that same day being newly dedicated...

I was the pastor officiating at the service, and I knew, because I had been part of the Hewes family for almost 50 years, that what is true of all families was also true of the Hewes family... Which is, that in the mix of extended family both living and dead, there was brilliance and resilience, success and loving strong relationships, joy and hope, as well as disappointment and failure, abuse and addiction, broken relationships and generational trauma that still played a part in the family story...

And, despite all this, I also knew everyone who gathered that day from all over the country, some of whom hadn't seen each other for twenty years, would be civil and polite.... and I expected as much... But something else happened that I didn't expect...

- Maybe it was the beauty of the day and the place...

- Maybe it was the reminder of life's tenuous nature and the certainty of death...

- Maybe it was the stories that were shared, including the story of the day in December 20 years ago when the Hewes brothers, living in places from one side of the US to the other, and in the midst of some relational challenges, surprised Chase on his 60th birthday by appearing in the Boise, Idaho Costco as Chase went through the store looking for the items on the list his wife Joyce had given him; Chase finding one brother in front of the carrots, one in front of the pasta and one in front of the Cheerios... All of them spending the next four days finding each

other... That event, happening as it did in December, from that time forward being called our "Costco Christmas" ...

-Maybe it was the reminder that forgiveness is the decision not to let the past dictate the future...

-Maybe it was the lines in Wendell Berry's poem spoken that day that say, *"heaven is that place where those who love each other have forgiven each other, and where for that the leaves are green, the light a music in the air, and all is unentangled and all is undismayed" ...*

-Maybe it was my sister-in-law Audrey singing in her gorgeous deep alto voice, "What a Wonderful World" ...

-Maybe it was the beautiful words at the end of the funeral service in the Book of Common Prayer commending Chase into the "arms of God's mercy, into the blessed rest of everlasting peace, and into the glorious company of the saints in light" Or the most audacious and hopeful words in all the world, "All of us go down to the dust; yet even at the grave we make our song. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia."

I'm not sure just what it was... But I will tell you this... after the service was over, one person who had not spoken to another for years, walked over to the one from whom he'd been estranged and put his arms around her... And another said we'd just experienced a Costco Christmas in October...

And for a good long time, right there in the Riverside Cemetery in Farmington, Connecticut, as people talked and shook hands and embraced, the scene looked just Wendell Berry's poem, and the saints

of God in that place, both living and dead, including me, knew in a way they had not known before, that in the fulness of God's love the past cannot and does not dictate the future... **Because the fullness of that future is always breaking into the present to transform the past by the power of love...**

The Hewes family saints bringing this promise to our All Saints collage this morning... yet one more piece to hold onto in the geography of grief and loss...

All of which is to say, I'm so grateful for all the saints I've spoken of this morning... And I'm wondering if it's possible for us to be "saints-in-the-making" ourselves... inspired by the saints who've gone before us and the saints still among us to help others sense the possibility of something so beautiful and true and real and "gasp" it raises their heads, breaks open their hearts, and frees them to move again, no matter how uncertain the way ahead may be...

I'm wondering on this All Saints Sunday if this might be possible... And trusting that it is... because, my dear friends, you sure look like a bunch of saints-in-the-making to me.