All Saints Day

Rev. 7:9-17 Ps. 34 1 Jn. 3:1-3 Matt. 5:1-12

A sermon given by Pastor Elaine Hewes

St. Brendan Episcopal Church Nov. 1, 2026

As some of you know, soon after the birth of my first grandchild 15 years ago, I wrote a children's book which my son-in-law from Sweden illustrated using an ancient Swedish art form called "Kurbitz." I wrote the book as a way to try to impart to my grandson (and really to any child who might read the book), the message that lives and sings at the heart of our Christian faith.

The book is entitled "The Wind Had a Secret," and on the title page it says, *"The last page of this book can be sung to the tune of "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star," and is intended to be a lullaby of comfort in difficult times. The wind, which bears the secret song of comfort from the beginning of time, is the word "ruach" in Hebrew, which can also be translated as "breath" or "spirit."*

It's a book I think, that resonates with one of the themes at the heart of All Saints Day… And so, I will give you a gist of the story, beginning by reading the first few pages…

The Wind had a Secret

If you've ever been scared by a sound in the night,

If ever the darkness has given you fright,

Then open the window and draw very near

To hear the wind's secret sung in your ear…

The wind had a secret. It was a secret she had kept for a very long time. But like most secrets, it couldn't be closed up inside her forever…

So one night she sailed a trail to the silvery moon, and whispered the secret to him.

When the moon heard the secret, he swooned a tune to the nearest star, and whispered it to her...

And so the story continues, with *the star hearing the secret and whispering it to the mountain....*

The mountain hearing the secret, and whispering to a craggy old tree…

The tree hearing the secret, and whispering it to a meandering stream…

The stream hearing the secret, and whispering it to a flowery meadow…

The meadow hearing the secret, and whispering to an evening bird…

The bird hearing the secret, and whispering it to a new mother…

And then, to pick up the story there…

When the mother heard the secret, she drew very near to her baby's ear, and whispered it to him…

And if you listen very closely, you can hear the secret too. Here it is…

Love is strong and love is true.
Love holds the world and love holds you.
Let the nighttime sounds you hear
Sing of love that's ever near.
Now my child, sleep well, good night.
Everything will be all right.

Shhhh…. Listen…

I decided to share my children's book with you on this All Saints Day because I think it offers an additional definition of the world "saint"

to the many definitions already in common usage… In this case suggesting that a saint is someone who in word or deed passes onto to others (rather like in the telephone game), the promise of the love that is stronger than death… the promise that because love is stronger than death, in the end everything will be alright…

Of course in the context of our faith, we think of this as God's love, carried in the ruach, wind, the breath, and the spirit of the One whose essence and presence has always been and forever will be about creation, liberation, and transformation on behalf of reconciliation, justice, and peace…The fullness and completeness for which we still wait, trusting in the promise that it will be… future tense … that it will be a reality in the fulness of time and in the expansive eternal reach of God's grace…

The saints being those who point to this promise, and encourage us to trust in its coming, despite all evidence to the contrary… Which is exactly what the writers of Revelation and 1 John were up to in our first and second lessons for this morning as they addressed early Christian communities suffering under the oppressive and violent policies of the Roman Empire…

The writer of Revelation envisioning a future time when all peoples and nations will gather around the incarnate presence of God made known in Jesus, and where, to quote some of the most beautiful words in all of Scripture,

They will hunger no more, and thirst no more;

The sun will not strike them,

Nor any scorching heat;

For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd,

And he will guide them to springs of the water of life,

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes…

And the writer of 1 John, while assuring those in his Christian community that they already **are** (present tense) children of God, there will yet be (future tense) a time when God will be revealed to them in God's fullness, and when, on that great glorious day, they will not only see God as God is, but will be as God is…

Both of these writers, along with a host of others "saints" down through the centuries (some of whom have been part of our everyday lives and for whom we give thanks today), being among the great cloud of witnesses who have pointed to the promise carried on the breath, the "ruach" of God since the beginning… Those saints passing the promise on like the characters in my children's book, trying as best they can, like in the telephone game, to keep the message true, even when the world tries to distort, undermine or sell it to the highest bidder…

Our All Saints Day celebration is a reminder of the promise toward which we turn, and for which we wait… and the saints are those who help us hear the promise and to trust in the vision of shalom and reconciliation and peace the promise holds up for us to see, however dimly, from this side of the river… It is a future orientation…

But the Gospel text appointed for this morning, which is the Beatitudes from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, will not let us stay fixed in a future orientation…

But rather orients us to the present moment with all of its present tense "blessed are-s"…

*Blessed **are** the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven…*

*Blessed **are** those who mourn…*

*Blessed **are** the meek…*

*Blessed **are** those who hunger and thirst for righteousness…*

*Blessed **are** the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers…*

*Blessed **are** those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake…*

Not that each Beatitude doesn't have a future component to it… Because most of them do… As in "for they **will be** comforted, they **will** inherit the earth, they **will** receive mercy…" **But the present tense verb "are" sets the tone and the direction of each Beatitude, almost as if they are each saying, "Start here… start now… where you are… and then reach into the promised blessing still not yet realized… take it to yourself, and bring it into the present moment where it can go to work on your heart, your life, your decision-making, your creating, your dancing and singing and caring and loving…"**

This is so hard for us to understand, because we have been taught to see the Beatitudes through the lens of "do good and you will be rewarded"… Not unlike the pious "beatitudes" some of us grew up with… like the one my mother would sometimes recite, "Blessed is the

young woman who can bake a good pie, for she will land a good husband"… or the one some of our Sunday School teachers taught us… "Blessed are you my child for going to church every Sunday and reading your Bible every day, for you will go to heaven"…

The underlying meaning of this way of reading the Beatitudes being entirely transactional in nature… "Blessed are those who do 'this particular thing,' for they will be rewarded"…

"When it's more like this," Bishop Brown once said in a sermon on the Beatitudes… "It's like in the Wizard of Oz"…

"So there was Dorothy," he said, "looking toward the promise of home if she could just get to the Emerald City… And the scarecrow looking toward the promise of getting a brain, the lion looking toward the promise of getting courage, and the tin man looking toward the promise of getting a heart… if they could just get to the Emerald City…

When what happened is that each of them looked toward that promise, and reached for that promise, then brought the trust in that promise to their journey… to the difficult and frightening moments on the way… And in so doing, the promise shaped them, and went to work on their hearts, their lives, their decision-making, their creating, their dancing and singing and caring and loving as they brought the promise, still yet a vision (a hope yet on the way to becoming), to the present moment, and so in the **present moment**, knew the blessing, the blessedness and joy of heart and mind and courage and home (which by the has less to do with Kansas than with love)…"

(No wonder one theologian has said, "All the way to heaven is heaven.")

Not unlike the civil rights workers in our country in the 1960's who looked toward that day when the promise of dignity, equality and peace for all God's children would become a reality, and in that looking and longing and trusting, reached forward and brought the vision of that promise to their present moment… Acting on that promise so the rest of us could see…

Or not unlike any of us who will go to the polls this Tuesday with the vision of God's kingdom yet to come in our hearts and minds, and trusting that future vision, will bring it to the present moment, and to the best of our ability, will choose leaders who have pledged to care for the vulnerable, the marginalized, the immigrant, and our Mother Earth…

Or not unlike what happened in Brooksville on the last Saturday in September when 118 vehicles paraded by Tim Fowler's house the day after he returned home from Boston after undergoing stem cell treatment for cancer…

As reported in the Weekly Packet, "Quietly organized by Matt Dow, Josh Gray and Daryl Astbury in the days before Fowler's return home, the parade was initially expected to draw 40 to 50 vehicles…

"But as the trucks started assembling at Buster Peasley's shop in North Brooksville, it was obvious they had seriously underestimated the number of people – and businesses – that wanted to participate…

“Fire trucks from Blue Hill, Brooklin, Brooksville, Deer Isle, Penobscot and Sedgwick – more than 15 units in total – were joined by trucks from as far away as Ellsworth.

“More than 70 trucks, accompanied by almost 50 pickups and cars, formed the 118-vehicle procession past Fowler’s house.

“Widely respected across the Blue Hill Peninsula and very involved in community activities, Fowler and his brother Michael. Who passed away in 2024, took over the Brooksville-based excavating and construction business, Frank O. Fowler and Sons, started by his father in 1947.”

If this isn’t a vision of a future “heaven” brought to the present moment, I don’t know what is… And let me just say that one of the organizers of the event, Daryl Astbury, was one of my first-grade students when I taught in Sedgwick decades ago… Daryl, who lugged a massive Tonka truck in each hand onto the bus and into school every morning, and back home at the end of the day… Daryl, who wore a badge on his shirt every day that read, “Alden’s son”… Daryl, who loved our classroom turtle named Cindy more than any other first grader, and who proudly took her home to spend summer vacation at his house…

Daryl, who, along with Matt Dow and Josh Gary, has now given me a new vision of God’s kingdom still to come (future tense)… a new vision to look toward, to reach for, to trust, as I take that image of 118 trucks and cars passing Tim Fowlers’ house in a gesture of love and support into myself and allow it to go work on my heart, my life, my decision-making, my creating, my dancing and singing and caring and loving in the present moment…

And giving me a new saint for whom to be grateful on this All Saints Day… (A saint still very much alive on this side of the river)… Daryl Astbury… A saint in the sense of him being someone who has helped me to trust that love is stronger than death, and to trust that because this true, in the end, everything will be all right…

All Saints Day is such a mixture of things… a mix of past, future, and present… a mix of feelings, including raw unmitigated grief for those we have loved who have died, **and** hope and trust, passed on to us by the saints in our lives, that death will not, does not have the last word… (If there's anything the story of Jesus tells us, it is this… Which is why one of my pastor friends says that All Saints Day is our November Easter)…

But above all, I think this day is, for us as Christians, as followers of Jesus (who with every fiber of his being pointed to the kingdom of God)… **I think All Saints Day is a call**… a call, to look toward that vision of shalom, of God's kingdom of peace and justice finally come into its fulness… **future tense**… and to take that vision into ourselves, to trust it… to hold onto it… to let it go to work on our hearts, our lives, our decision-making, our creating, our dancing and singing and caring and loving in each and every moment… **present tense…**

So that we too can be part of the great chain of witnesses who pass the promise on in word and in deed… The promise we sing now…

Love is strong and love is true.

Love holds the world and love holds you.

Let the nighttime sounds you hear

Sing of love that's ever near.

Now my child, sleep well, good night.

Everything will be all right.