

John 11:32-44 (NRSV)

When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

When Denise Hutchens called to set a date for Grant Alexander's baptism, I thought, oh, gosh, we wouldn't want to do a baptism on All Saints Sunday. After all, All Saints Sunday is the day on which we recognize the saints who have passed on into the Church Triumphant. A fine day but not a day on which you'd want to have a baptism.

So, you can imagine my surprise when I looked up in the manual on the liturgy and discovered that All Saints Sunday is *recommended* as a baptism festival, a day on which the church is *encouraged* to conduct baptisms. Clearly I had some rethinking to do about All Saints Sunday.

That rethinking begins with a re-examination of the promises of Jesus. Just before the Gospel reading for today, Jesus has a conversation with Martha, the sister of Lazarus, in which he says, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” Now, at first glance this seems like a contradiction, yes? Those who believe in me will live even if they die, says Jesus. But then he also says that those who believe in him will never die. How can both of these statements be true?

I think it is clear that the confusion rests on two very different ways of understanding life and death. One way is in terms of physical existence in the world we see and experience. We live and then we die. This is the life that is promised to Adam and Eve in the third chapter of Genesis – a life of struggle, of wringing an existence from the earth. “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust and to dust you shall return.” These are the words that we say on Ash Wednesday when we make the sign of the cross on our foreheads. In a very real sense, the life of Adam and Eve after leaving the Garden is the life of Ash Wednesday.

This life has its joys and its sorrows but it is a life defined by limits. Limited length, limited opportunities, limited choices. This is the life to which Lazarus is returned – he is taken out of the earth and he would be returned to it. This is the life that we are all promised.

But there is another life Jesus tells us about in John’s Gospel and much of John’s Gospel tells us about that life. In the fifth chapter

of John, Jesus tells us, “Anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life.” And a sentence later, “the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.” This is not a story about some future time when the dead will be raised – the hour is now here, the hour in which the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear it will live.”

What Jesus is saying is that in this second sense of “life” we were all dead, we were all condemned, we were all under judgment, but that with the coming of the Son of Man, we pass from death into life. Through Jesus, through the kind of death he would die, we will live. We will not be returned to life as Lazarus is returned to life, but rather we will live a life reconciled to God, not under judgment but rather under grace, in this life and in whatever else follows.

This second sense of life is less about limits and more about possibilities, less about frustration and more about fulfillment, less about sweat and more about sweet, less about wrath and more about reconciliation.

Now, don’t misunderstand me, we still live the life that is promised to Adam and Eve, the life of Ash Wednesday. We will still wring our existence from the earth by the sweat of our brows. There will be both joy and suffering, both pleasure and pain. But alongside that life, threaded through that life, supporting and upholding that life is a life in which we are one with God, a life in which suffering and frustration and pain are part of the larger story of God reconciling the world to himself.

This resurrection life is the life that we celebrate on All Saints Sunday, a life with God in which all saints participate, and in which we are all Saints, living and dead. We recall the lives of those who have gone before us in the life of Ash Wednesday, the life of Adam

and Eve, a life that was and is limited and sometimes frustrating and painful. But we celebrate, too, the life that we come to know as baptized children of God, a life that is limited only by the grace of God, which, as we know has no limits. A life of meaning and purpose and beauty, because this, too, is the life of all the saints.

This is the life that Grant Alexander Van Fleet becomes a part of today, and that is why All Saints Sunday is a perfect day for a baptism. Today Grant Alexander receives a new life claimed by God, joined with God, part of God. Grant Alexander passes, and we pass with him, from judgment into grace, from a life of limits to a life limited only by God's limitless grace.

Amen.