

**For All the Saints**  
Oak Grove Presbyterian Church  
Rev. Dr. Anne Fisher  
November 1, 2020  
OT Isaiah 25:6–9  
Revelation 21:1–6a

Usually when I read this passage from John’s Revelation, I am standing with a family at the gravesite. I read this passage as the last part of the service in order to have the final words, which the family hears to be words of hope. The image of a new heaven and a new earth is something that the loved ones can take with them as they begin their lives without the physical presence of one so close to them.

A reading from Revelation:

**Revelation 21: 1–6, 9**

<sup>1</sup> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup>And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; <sup>4</sup>he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” <sup>5</sup>And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” <sup>6</sup>Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty, I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

As Christians, we know that the final chapter has not yet been written. There is more to come. Being followers of the risen Christ means that not only do we deal with the things of the present time, but we are people who have a vision of what will come. We set our sights on this world and this place in time, but there is also something just beyond the horizon as we look toward what is to come.

This is not only about ourselves but about those who have been close to us, those loved ones who were with us and are now gone. This is about all the saints who have touched our lives and helped to shape our values and have inspired us with their faith and faithful action. This is for all the saints who from their labors rest.

There are not many times that we focus our sights toward the eternal things. We are immersed in the trivial details of the day. Frankly there is lots to occupy us in this present time. How we manage the immediate day draws more attention than what is happening after this life is done. Keeping an eye on what will be helps us in our daily routines and decisions. We Christians are not just people of the moment but we are bearers of hope of what will be as well.

A glimpse of what will be comes in the form of a vision, for Isaiah it is in the form of a feast. It is not just any feast but one filled with fattening things.

Remember this is addressed to people where food can be sparse. Through our eyes we read it with the attitude of what we should and should not eat. Either way, this is a mind-blowing image that we may not be able to fully trust. This vision may be too rich, too decadent for our sensibilities. It is a vision that Isaiah offers the people of Israel who

were much more familiar with lean and sparse rather than fat and feasting.

Imagine a time when all that holds us back, all the "if onlys" in our lives that limit and oppress us will be no longer. Imagine a time without limits, where sadness is eliminated and tears are not needed.

When our children were little, we dealt with limits and tears on a daily basis. Christina tried to fly and fell down, or Liz got her feelings hurt because of some thoughtless word. That is all part of the course of life. Limits such as gravity or tactful words, are for our benefit and our good. Tears remind us that we are feeling human creatures who have reached a limit.

We also know that the hurts run far deeper than childish traumas, the hurts that are inflicted upon us and the hurts we inflict upon others can be more difficult to find relief.

We are continually bumping against our limits. We live in the limits of time of being able to do more; be more effective; be more successful. We start out thinking our possibilities are limitless, but soon find road blocks and detours and life intrude on our space, that we start in with the if only... and come up falling short. These past months have shown us limits. We are faced with a disease that has no boundaries no matter how prepared or how good or even how strong we are. We are confronted that this vast planet has its own limits. Yet we try to stretch the boundaries and ignore the warnings. We push the limits.

Then we have this vision that someday the tears will be gone. The limits and restrictions will be removed, as all the rules and restrictions disappear. We are not lost in anarchy but caught up in unmitigated joy, and uncorrupted celebration. Such a time will come.

We are not there yet. In this year of so much to deal with, we know we have a way to go. Our present reality pulls us back. As we feel how unsettled we are, we also realize the entire world is groaning in pain. Our earth is trembling with fires, storms, earthquakes and typhoons. Our country is roiling in uncertainty, anger and fear. What overrides it all is a profound sense of grief. The losses we have had, the desire to return to what was, we realize the reality that we are forever changed.

The vision of Isaiah is before us. As Christians, we are involved with what is happening today, but we also know what is to come. We remember the saints in our lives who knew the reality of the present but also embraced the reality of what will be. Who are the saints who laid a path for us to follow? Who have lived in the present but also kept the vision that the best is yet to come?

It is the saints of my life that assure me the visions of Isaiah and Revelation are trustworthy and true.

Mrs. Zerby lived at the Presbyterian Home where I worked washing dishes during my high school years in Pennsylvania. After a meal, she would stop by the entrance to the kitchen to tell me what a good job I was doing. Although her life as she aged was getting more restricted, her attitude was positive and she exuded a calm and peaceful demeanor. She was one of the saints who fed me. Even when she did not realize someone was watching her she had such an expression of peace. I remember after college I came back for a visit at the Presbyterian Home. I stopped in to see Mrs. Zerby, one of my favorites. She was always interested in what I was doing and who I was becoming, expected a grand welcome where we would catch up. I found her sitting by her window totally blind, and she politely told me that she did not remember as well as she used to. I was a stranger to her but she welcomed me in her place. Even though her sight and her memory were gone and even

worse that she knew it was gone, Mrs. Zerby exuded that calm and caring peace that continued to radiate around her. I was sad for all her losses but also inspired by her facing her losses with dignity and grace.

I believe the saints that we can name in our lives know what it means to be present in this life. They know that what we have today is not all there is. The saints in our lives also have their eye on the horizon when there will be a time when there will be no more tears, no more forgetfulness, no more loss. The saints in our lives have given us glimpses that all is not lost. The saints are the standard-bearers of hope, while their feet are firmly planted here on earth.

Today we give thanks for the saints in our lives. What makes a saint? There is no age or education requirements; no prerequisites of any sort. It takes a person who is deeply involved in the present, who cares for those on the journey with them and has a confidence and peace of what is to come. Our saints are the banner carriers hope. No matter what our present situation, there will be a time when all of this does not matter.

As we gather this day for our earthly feast let us be mindful of the heavenly one that is to come. A feast beyond our imaginations where everyone will have more than enough, and let us be mindful of the saints in our lives who have helped us to this table and who point us to that glorious feast to come. Amen.