

### **Study Guide November 4, 2018**

**Readings:** Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9; Psalm 24; Revelations 21:1-6; John 11:32-44

**Theme:** All Saints Day, All Souls Day, Memorial Sunday,

Each year Christian churches pay homage to the lives of those who have gone on to be with God and the saints. In the Roman Catholic and many Anglican Churches, All Saints Day is celebrated on the first of November. In the Eastern Orthodox Church, it is celebrated on the first Sunday after Pentecost. Either way, All Saints Day closes off and completes Easter.

In select parts of Europe, Central America, and the Philippines, family and friends visit the graves to remember the dead and to celebrate their lives by sharing meals and singing. Flowers and candles are often placed on the tombstone, creating an illuminating display of God's presence united with the beloved soul. (A beautiful example of this is in the Disney Pixar movie *Coco*.) For many, All Souls Day re-ignites the eternal question: What happens to my soul after I die? Yet nobody ever seems to be in a hurry to find out the real answer.

This week my message comes from the prophecy of Zechariah. I chose this over the lectionary readings for a reason. I believe it answers that question about our soul from a perspective that memorializes the faith and teachings of Jesus. It also seems to be fitting given the fact that many of us will be voting on Tuesday. I'm sure someone will give me an earful about how ministers shouldn't mix politics with religion. But then again, I vote Jesus.

The Bible confirms salvation comes through Jesus Christ. His life and words offer a pretty clear answer to our query about our souls, and life after death. It might be bold of me to say, but I believe the way we live our lives today (including how we vote) pave the way for saving our souls without sacrificing the world. For it was Jesus who said, what good is it to gain the world but lose your soul. Jesus shows us how we can have both and still be good with God.

#### **READ: Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9; Zechariah 7**

Though it came a hundred or so years before Christ, this reading anticipates Christian doctrines of life after death and the justice of God. It's like a bridge between the Old and New Testaments. The passage celebrates human connection with the deceased and insists that human perceptions regarding the dead are not as they seem. Death is not so much a punishment, or something to fear, but a change of being and an entry into a complete life with God.

**Q:** In what ways has this text challenged your preconceived notions of death or changed the way you see resurrection?

**Q:** How do God's words in Zechariah make you think about life before death?

**Q:** Where do you find the hope and promise of God most fulfilled in these verses?

**Prayer:** Lord God, open my eyes to receive you today and in my time of death. Amen.

**READ: Revelations 21:1-6, Isaiah 1:10-20**

The book of Revelation encourages us to use our imaginations. This passage is no different. Belief in the New Jerusalem was widespread in biblical times. As one who was experiencing the atrocities of Roman rule, the writer likely had no another outlet to process the pains of an oppressed life. By entering the world of the writer's imagination, we not only catch a glimpse of the writer's imaginative escape—a heavenly city descending from above—but we are reminded of the importance of our own images for a better future. These images might consist of a renewed commitment to civil discourse in our country, a world without homelessness, or a society with affordable health care for all people. But our imaginations are not just limited to the things of this world; they can also explore the world to come.

- Q:** What are some of the first things you pictured when you read the first part of Revelations 21? Where did you find hope?
- Q:** Having read about your future in Revelations and having read warnings from the past in Isaiah, how might you change the way you live in the present?
- Q:** How has your impression of God been changed in light of these two readings?

**Prayer:** God, let your Spirit move me to be prepared for my sainthood tomorrow by guiding me to live in your righteousness today. Amen

**READ: John 11:32-44**

With all the suffering and tragedy in the world today, I find this passage refreshing because it tells me that God is with us in our pain and in our darkest moments. In this wonderful story, Jesus is moved to tears. In a display of his full humanity, Jesus grieves the loss of his friend, Lazarus. But in the middle of his grief, Jesus is flooded with questions, perhaps accusations, that he could have saved him. That has to hurt. But Jesus' the full divinity is also on display as resurrects Lazarus and solidifies the faith of Mary, Martha, and the other members of the crowd. The passage is especially pertinent at the celebration of All Saints' not because it deals with death, but because it is a passage that epitomizes eternal life, the promise that God has made through Christ to each of us.

- Q:** What does it mean to you that Jesus was human?
- Q:** How has the Divinity Jesus called you out of death and into life?
- Q:** Where in this passage do you find your hope in God's promise to you?

**Prayer:** Lord Christ, awaken in me a new spirit today as I walk in your glory, Amen.

**Slow Read Psalm 24** and visualize yourself in a place of honor in God's Creation. For you are God's beloved child.