

## Lay Preachers' Bulletin – November 2021

*November's lectionary notes have been provided by the Reverend Oz Lorentzen, Incumbent of St. Barnabas, Medicine Hat.*

### **November 7, 2021** - All Saints

John 11:32-44

Propers: BAS page 427

Both the passage from Revelation and John's Gospel give us some biblical background for the great theme of “the communion of saints” which underlies this feast day. More particularly, the communion of saints includes the past, present, and future as well as encompassing the entire world! This is our statement of faith, because death is not the end of our existence, it does not have the final word, it does not separate us from God or from one another.

- Reflect on the comfort that this truth brings.
  - How do you view and respond to death?
  - How about your parish? Your community?
  - How did Jesus respond to death? (You may wish to remind people about Jesus' statement to Martha earlier in this chapter (v. 25-26).)
  
- The passage begins with Mary telling Jesus that he could have prevented the death of Lazarus. (This repeats Martha's statement from earlier in the chapter—see v.21.)
  - Does grief and disappointment lead to blaming God?
  - Have you observed this response?
  - Is that healthy and normal?
  - Maybe an understandable response, that needs to be worked through - witness Martha's move to a statement of faith in Jesus, v. 22f.
  - Does this normal disappointment, this normal reaction, have anything to do with Jesus' response?
  - He is “deeply moved in spirit and troubled” and “Jesus wept.” Why?
  - What is going on in Jesus' response? Does he sympathize?
  - Is he grieving too?

- Think about the voice of God calling you from the sepulchre of your spirit/soul/life?
  - Like Lazarus, as you come forth, are their things that bind you?
  - Hinder you? Are you still wearing your death clothes?
  - Jesus says, “Unbind him, and let him go.” Is this a word for you today?
  - For your Parish?
  - Are we alive yet still bound by the trappings of death?
  
- Though Martha has earlier made a tremendous statement of faith in Jesus, when Jesus says remove the stone, she points out how impractical this action is.
  - Do we tend to respond to God that way?
  - Do we see the impossibilities of following God's lead?
  - Has God promised to meet us, lead us, provide for us?
  - Do we believe ourselves to be called to some action/plan/future?
  - Are we halting in our obedience/response?
  - Can you hear Jesus' reminder to Martha “Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the Glory of God?”
  - It may be appropriate here to talk a little about what it means to believe
    - An act of trust, surrender and commitment **not** mental assent to a statement!

**November 14, 2021** - Pentecost 25

Hebrews 10:11-25

Propers: BAS page 392

\*Notes for Remembrance Sunday follow the notes for Pentecost 25.

- Read before and after this passage to get the wider development of the author's thought.
  
- It may be helpful to do some background reading on the role of the sacrifice, priests and the high priest in the Old Testament era, since this provides the backdrop for the book of Hebrews, especially in this passage. It is also good

practice to look up the quotations of scripture being quoted by the New Testament writers to get the fuller picture of what they are saying.

- A central part of the logic of this passage seems to be that since God has said (promised through Jeremiah) that he will not remember our sins, then there is no longer any need to do anything about those sins!
  - Can it be that simple?
  - Are there other places in scripture that talk about God “forgetting” our sins?
  - Do we, perhaps, remember our sins too well?
  - Is that part of the problem?
  - Do folks in your parish struggle with guilt & shame?
  - How might this passage apply to the issues of guilt and shame?
  
- Jesus has thrown the gates of Heaven wide open! “Whosoever will may come!” This passage closes with an invitation to enter the very throne room of God, with rich allusions to the Holy of Holies, the inner part of the temple in Jerusalem.
  - Is Holiness, the sacred, a concept that communicates to you and your congregation?
  - Do we have a sense that that is what we are doing as we gather to worship?
  - How can this inform our coming together as God's people?
  - Realizing that there is both a corporate and individual application, what might we do differently?
  - How might we prepare differently?
  - Compare the similar call/ideas in Hebrews 12:18-24 and Hebrews 4:12-16.
  
- The passage ends with the description of how we come now to God, how we have full access through Jesus! Part of this provision, this manner of coming, is our baptism, or imagery that combines the ritual purity of the temple sacrificial system with the new Christian sacrament of baptism.
  - Does this resonate in your parish?
  - With you?
  - Is there some need/room for teaching on baptism?
  - A need for growth in understanding the sacramental nature of our faith?

- Is there any help/benefit is being reminded of our baptism?
  - Has it cleaned our hearts “from an evil conscience?”
  - Are our “bodies washed with pure water?”
  - What difference would that make if it were true?
  - What would it change about our ideas, attitudes and behaviours as we worship God, come to God?
- Hebrews is a book written to encourage, support and fix the resolve of people who are under persecution, who are facing hard times.
    - Are there connections in your context with the need for support and encouragement?
    - Are there hardships facing your parish or members in your parish?
    - What in this passage could be used for encouragement?
    - How do you motivate others to “stand firm?”
    - What would it look like to “provoke one another to love and good deeds?”
    - Is that a need in your parish?
    - How about the need to meet together?
    - Why is that important?
    - What does meeting together have to do with our facing struggles, especially facing the impending Day (of the Lord)?

OR

### **Remembrance Day**

1 Peter 1:3-9

Propers: BAS page 429

\*note, some of the comments/questions from All Saints Day above are pertinent to the John 11 passage for this day.

- “Greater Love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13) The passage in 1 Peter speaks a lot about being proved, proved by our trials. Our hardships reveal who we really are. This is especially true for the ultimate sacrifice, that of laying down one's life for another.

- As we honor our veterans this day, what can we say about the result of their testing?
  - What is true about them in light of the sacrifices they have made?
  - How do we honor them today?
  - Are they an example we are able to follow?
  - Are we encouraged and strengthened by their sacrifice, as we respond to scripture's advice to stand firm in our own testing?
  - Is their's a gift that keeps on giving?
- Peter paints a glorious picture of the secure and unfailing nature of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. His description of present and future events is full of confidence in the outcome! He is confident our faith will be proved and that we are rejoicing, even in the hard times.
    - Reflect on the power of being confident of the outcome of something before you begin.
    - What difference does this make?
    - How about being uncertain or fearful?
    - How would that influence the outcome?
    - Can you think of examples from your own life and/or the life of the parish and community?
    - What difference does having a confident leader make?
    - Or, a negative, fearful one?
    - Are there connections here with Remembrance Day?
- Reflect on the tremendous importance of hope! Peter says God has brought us new life into a “living hope.”
    - Is there such a thing as dead hope?
    - Does the idea of a “living hope” connect with you?
    - Can you think of examples in your context that illustrate the difference between a dead hope and a living hope?
    - How important is hope?
    - In practical situations, what difference does true hope make?
    - What sorts or behaviours or outcomes does it lead to?
    - Romans 15:13 says, “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Think about using this as a benediction you say to one

another at the end of the service (or the end of the sermon). Our hope cannot get any more secure than this, God is the God of Hope!

## **November 21, 2021** - Reign of Christ

John 18:33-38

Propers: BAS page 394

\*Note, I have included v 38 which completes the scene before Pilate.

- Jesus invites us to redefine our concept of kingship, authority, rule & power. “My Kingdom is not of this world,” he says.
  - How would you characterize Jesus' understanding of Kingship?
  - What do you know about Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God?
  - The beatitudes in Matthew 5 would be a good summary statement, as well as Luke 4:16-21.
  - What connections are there in your life/context?
- Jesus' view of leadership has been characterized as servant leadership.
  - Are there examples from your life & community of someone having authority, “power,” influence and leadership because they were self-sacrificing and served others?
  - Is this a believable approach to leadership?
  - What view of leadership characterizes your parish?
- There are several statements about the Reign of Christ feast day that say something like, “Jesus reigns from the cross,” or “His throne is made from the wood of the cross.”
  - Do these summary statements help us re-think kingship?
  - Do they contain an important insight into how Jesus' reign is experienced or expressed today?
  - It's ironic that we use a conversation Jesus has in his trial that led to his rejection, suffering and death, as a comment on Jesus' reign as King! Are we missing something in this trial scene?
  - Commentaries say that in John's Gospel it is Pilate who is on trial, **not** Jesus. Is that still true today?

- Are we, and our ambitions for power, our ideas of leadership and influence, on trial as we witness this portrayal of our king, Jesus?
  - Is there a tendency or desire to forget about this portrayal of the kingship of Jesus?
  - Or, can we see how this allows us to better understand, to re-frame, our struggles and disappointments?
  - What are we expecting Jesus' kingship to do for us?
  - Is this consistent with this portrayal of his kingship?
- Jesus points to truth as an important factor in recognizing Jesus. Pilate dodges this invitation, this exposure of himself, by quipping, “what is truth.” Truth is an important theme for John. In Chapter 8 Jesus says to those who believed on him, “If you continue in my word, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” Knowing truth is not a product of hearing but of doing—living in and acting out of the words of Jesus. This is precisely what Pilate does not do.
    - Do we use skepticism about what God has said as a way to avoid doing what God has said?
    - Do we act on what God has revealed?
    - What type of actions would this picture of Jesus' kingship lead us to do?
    - Are there factors in our culture & community, that deny truth, that side with Pilate's dismissive question?
    - How do we follow Christ as King in a pluralistic, politically correct environment?
    - Are there specific issues you (the parish) are facing in these areas?
    - What is the answer?
    - Does this passage provide any guidance in these situations?

**November 28, 2021** - First Sunday in Advent

Luke 21:25-36

Propers: BAS page 268

Advent has three emphases: Past, at the incarnation, Present, as Jesus by the Spirit is present and comes to us in our daily life, and Future, Jesus will return in power and glory as acknowledged King and Lord, consummating God's good

plan for all of creation. All of these aspects of Jesus' threefold coming have elements of surprise and violate the expectations (the wisdom) of the world, religious and non-religious. We are not, however, to be caught by surprise. This is why Jesus counsels us so many times to watch & wait, to be ready!

I would recommend that you do not adopt some pre-set approach to Advent like the first Sunday is hope, the second is love, etc. Instead, let the scriptures point you to the theme for the day.

- The difficulty of these second coming passages is that they do not seem to have any relevance to our day, the time before the second coming. Hebrews 12:26-29 refers to the picture we have in the Gospel and tells us two things. First, what is going on is that the temporal things are being dissolved so that the eternal will remain. And, second, that we are already involved in the eternal. These truths do inform our present, they have something to say about the time before the return of Christ as King. We can see any time of upheaval, like our current COVID realities, as an instance where what can be shaken is being removed, so that what is unshakable will remain! So, the Gospel command to “left up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” is a command that can resonate, is true, for us today.
  - What would that look like in the challenges you face, or individuals face in your community?
  - What application is there for your parish?
  - Are we so attached to the “shakable” things in our life that we cannot rejoice in having them removed?
  - Do we value the temporal over the eternal?
  - Are these productive ways to reflect on the promised return of Christ?
- We *are* called to be aware, to be prepared. The Gospel ends with this reminder/warning.
  - Reflect on what being prepared looks like?
  - Have you ever had to prepare for a blizzard, a windstorm, a flood?
  - What did that look like?
  - What became priority in this situation?
  - What was moved to non-urgent status?
  - Can we apply these principles to our life individually or as a community or

parish?

- Is there a danger of overreacting in our preparation?
  - Acting out of fear?
  - There are many examples during COVID of misinformation and overreacting. What does a balanced response look like?
- What are the dangers to being alert or prepared?
    - How about complacency?
    - Jesus speaks of waiting/watching/preparedness in several places (as does the rest of scripture). Look up some of these passages to help think about the ways in which we get distracted or fail in our waiting.
    - This passage lists some pitfalls: hearts weighted down with dissipation, drunkenness, and the cares of life. Do these have application in your context? (What is dissipation? Look this up in a dictionary.)
    - What is the Advent message for us in light of these considerations?
- On a positive side, the Gospel talks about being alert and praying. One could see this as a definition of what waiting/preparedness looks like. Think about prayer in this context.
    - What type of prayer is effective?
    - How is prayer a way of being prepared?
    - Does it have to do with the earlier call to “discern the times?”
    - To be aware of the signals?
    - We all know the signs of spring and harvest; can we develop the discernment necessary to see God's purposes being worked out?
    - Of course, there are a lot of people who have and continue to see the “end” coming in all sorts of world/natural events, COVID being among them. How do we know the difference?
    - How do we recognize the real signs! Is prayer an important part of this?
    - How so?
    - Can we also abuse this focus on the “end times?”
    - Can it become a fixation? Where is the balance?