

In Newness of Life

Isaiah 25:6-9

Romans 6:3-9

Oct 29, 2023

Rev. Donna Vuilleumier

Isaiah 25:6-9

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Romans 6:3-9

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.

--

My friend Deborah recently celebrated her mother's 'second birthday'. Her mother, Betty, had been a talented amateur artist, so part of the day's commemoration was to look again at some of her paintings and to reminisce about Betty's talent and joy in painting. Many different and special memories associated with each beautiful piece of art were savored and enjoyed. The cardinal in the white birch tree brought back her love of cardinals, of nature, of walks in the woods. The flowers in another painting held memories of Betty's spring and summer gardens, the scent of the different flowers, the weeds that wanted to take over. An out-of-character abstract was all about trying something new when she first began to cope with her new Alzheimer's diagnosis.

'Second birthday,' is Deborah's powerful and profound view of the date that a loved one left this life for eternal life. It is her way of taking some of the pain, some of the sting, some of 'the shroud that is cast over all peoples,' away. It is a faith and wisdom that says death does not have dominion. It is a faith and wisdom that says that loss doesn't get to win. It brings her emphasis to life, to earthly life and to eternal life. For Deborah, the honoring of a 'second birthday' is a gentle, tender, hope-filled way of grieving. It takes the rawness of grief, it takes those unexpected pop-up trigger moments of song, of scent, of tears, of time, of anger, of anxiety, and shapes them into the future reality with Christ. It places life where death demands to intrude.

I wouldn't say that she imagines the 'second birthday' in quite the way Isaiah did, although his words certainly brought optimism and positive anticipation to those in exile then, and to those in sadness, emptiness, now. His words brought hope and light as he anticipated a specific Zion mountain banquet and bounty rich with delight and pleasures of the finest kinds to all of us looking towards a glorious future but who first must live in a present that has plenty of difficulties and challenges. For now we are mortal people living in a broken and all too often dangerous world, but in God's own time we will know only tears wiped away. We will know only gladness and rejoicing in redemption.

But I could say that Paul's words possibly echo in her imagination as the 'second birthday' is a newness of life, a way of walking with God, with Creator, Christ and Spirit, in and beyond this life. Mindful that when we were baptized into Jesus Christ, we were baptized into his death and his resurrection, we are an Easter people, we know that newness of life is also not just a future hope. It changes our present lives as well.

As followers of Jesus, we are indeed an Easter people. Not people of death, but people of life, because God is a God of life. And even after our bodies die, we live on in eternal life with God and with all who have gone before us. We don't know what that looks like or how it works, but we have that assurance that we will go on. Even after our bodies die.

Our God is a God of life. A God of life, love, and hope. Not a God of death, wrath, and anger, but a God of life, hope, and abundant love. So the focus is not on the afterlife, but on this life. The life that we are living. And on this day, we can look to the lives of the saints who have gone before us. The saints who have passed on our traditions for almost two thousand years in the Church. Look to how they lived while we are alive to see how to live. To look at the lives of others of whatever faith they are from, who have shown us how to live. Those who have shown us how to be God's people as we strive to create God's realm here on earth. God's vision here on earth.

As we remember beloved ones, who as the old hymn says, 'now from their labors rest', we know that we must still labor by the grace of the newness of life from our own baptisms. As we remember those who have gone before us, we remember how they each showed us, taught us, to walk in that newness of life.

On this day when we commemorate All Saints/All Souls, and we remember in words, song and candlelight those who opened the world of faith to us, those who had been important on our faith journeys, those who left us this year, we do remember not only their second birthday, but their impact on our lives, our hearts, our memories.

Since the 8th century the Church has honored saints on this day as All Saints Day, as amazing, incredible, people of exceptional holiness, whose walk in the newness of life was to be emulated, to be strived for. The Protestant Reformation shifted away from the Roman Catholic idea of saints as somehow super-holy disciples who can intercede between us and God, so that observing All Souls Day, we can be more attentive to remembering all the commonplace, everyday saints who have touched our lives.

Those who have gone before us that we remember today have shown us what a life of faith looks like. How to live faithfully. Some of them have also shown us how to die faithfully. How to die with dignity, with grace, with love and courage, and with faith in the face of death. How to face our mortality even as we live as fully as we dare to live in God's abundant life, embracing the life that God wants us to live. So today is a day to remember those who have died. And to do so by celebrating and remembering how they showed us to live. What they showed us, what they taught us as they passed on their faith to us as they shared fellowship with us here in

the church, and also outside the church as they served their families, their friends, and their community.

Through us these people live on. Through stories, through what they shared with us and taught us. They also live on in our memories. Our remembrances of them. How we remember and share stories about them, they will live on in us as they live on with God.ⁱⁱ

On this All Souls Day we can thank God together for the everyday saints, and for each one who connects us to the larger life in the Spirit, whether we are celebrating in their first birthday or after their second birthday. Amen.

ⁱ https://hymnary.org/text/for_all_the_saints_who_from_their_labors

ⁱⁱ Rev. David J. Huber-<http://www.pcucc.com/sermons/141102.html>