

Places in the Heart
Ephesians 1:11-23

All Saints' Sunday/ 3rd November 2019

Soon we will gather around this table and celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion. Before we share the meal we'll offer the Eucharistic prayer, the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving (also known as "the long prayer"). It has a structure to it with roots almost as old as the church. There are three main components of it (there are others, but I want to focus on three): the opening responses are known as the *Sursum Corda*—"Lift up your hearts; we lift them up to the Lord."). The *Sanctus* is the middle portion, which includes—"Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest." And perhaps the most important portion of the prayer comes right at the end, it's known as the *Epiclesis*. The *Epiclesis* is the petition for the Holy Spirit to be present in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup. It's a prayer for the Holy Spirit to connect our spirits with the very spirit of God. For it's the Spirit who makes this ordinary meal into a communion, a divine fellowship.

John Calvin (1509-1564) and others in the Reformed tradition put a lot of stock in the opening lines, the *Sursum Corda*. These words transport us in time and space and remind us that this earthly banquet is also a participation in the heavenly banquet. We lift up our hearts. Where? Into the presence of God, the presence of Christ. This is his table and when Christians eat and drink in his name, his presence is known among us.

The *Epiclesis* is also significant because we need the Holy Spirit to draw us into the presence of God. In fact, it's not too far a stretch to imagine this table and this entire sanctuary transported, elevated up into the heavenly realm, mystically participating in the joyful feast of the Lamb of God, mystically present before the throne of God, which John attests in his revelation (see Revelation 4). In some ways, this table is a link between heaven and earth, it's a liminal space, a threshold between this world and another, where hunger and pain and darkness are no more and every tear is wiped from every eye (Rev. 7:16-17). Jesus gave us this meal to help us remember this truth: we are never far from the presence of God. When we share this meal we gain strength knowing we share it with all those who have gone before us into the light of God's glory. This is why it's a joyful feast of the people of God for all those who live beyond death, whether in this world or the world to come. It's why Calvin wanted the Lord's Supper celebrated every Sunday in Geneva and it's also why Communion is not "just" a memorial meal, a "dour" event (to use a good Scots words) commemorating Jesus' death (as I was taught growing up in the Presbyterian church).¹ Yes, it is a memorial, but there's so much more going on here.

It's the joyful feast of the people of God, for all those who live beyond the power of death, both in this world or in the world to come. It points to and participates in this amazing claim of the church, that both heaven and earth are linked together through Christ. As John saw in his revelation, the followers of Christ are part of the great multitude; the countless followers of Christ across time are all part of one great procession, the procession of saints through time on the pilgrimage to the throne of the Living One.

Who is in the procession? The saints. And who are the saints? Look around. All those redeemed by the grace of Christ. I am a saint and you are a saint, not because of our heroic deeds, not because any of us are especially virtuous (because we're not), not because we performed miracles. We are saints not because of any good we might have done. We're not saints because we have faith. We are saints because God is faithful to us, because God has called us in Christ to Godself, to share in the very life of God, and enter on a lifelong pilgrimage to the Celestial City and, therefore, we are holy.

We're part of that great, grand procession of the saints that began long before any of us were born and will continue long after we're all dead. Today, we remember all those who have gone on before us in the procession. Those we said good-bye to too soon. Those we miss terribly today. Those who blessed our lives, those who suffered and made sacrifices that we might live. Those who loved us dearly and called out the best from within us. We remember those who have paved the way for us, and offered us a vision. We remember their witness and their love, their commitment to Christ and his church. All those who taught us how to sing "Jesus Loves Me," and embodied that love with their lives, in the decisions and risks they made. We are surrounded by them, a great crowd of witnesses who urge us on (Hebrews 12:1). Can you see them? Can you feel their presence? They are praying for us and hoping that we will accomplish through our lives and our loves what they couldn't do in theirs. They're ahead of us, led by the shepherd who leads us forward, equipped by the Spirit who allows us to step into the future with confidence and a hope that never disappoints. But they are also very close.

Last Sunday, I was thinking about the saints who have gone before us as we marked my twenty years here at CPC. I was remembering people who are no longer with us, but who were here in spirit last week. Members of this church, family and friends who have gone on before us, who urge us on and support us in this work of ministry. There was one moment in worship last week when a scene from one of my favorite movies came to mind. The beautiful closing scene from *Places in the Heart*, an emotionally affecting film, which came out in 1984, starring Sally Field and Ed Harris, about struggling through adversity and living with hope in a small Texas town during the 1930s. At the end of the film, we're in a small country church. It's a Communion Sunday. The choir is singing. The camera slowly moves through the congregation as folks serve one another bread and cup. We see the trays full of bread and trays with cups of grape juice (like we often use), moving from one character to the next. Then the camera turns to the front pew and we begin to realize something mystical is happening. As the camera moves along the pew we discover that all the characters from the film are in the pews sharing Communion, the living *and* the dead are all there, the wronged and the wrongdoers, the betrayers and the betrayed, the lambs and the wolves, friends and enemies, both black and white—they are all there together as one, united by grace, serving each other the cup of salvation, the wine of new life, and saying, "Peace of God." It's one of the most moving and theologically profound portrayals of Communion I have ever seen.

Here at the Lord's Table, on this All Saints' Sunday, we celebrate the communion of saints in light and our share in what Paul called "the riches of [God's] glorious inheritance among the saints" (Eph. 1:18). We are all together at this table, united by grace. We are all connected. On this Sunday we remember loved ones we said good-bye to this past year or many years ago,

we give thanks for their place in our hearts and for the place we share together in the heart of God.

¹ Viewing Holy Communion as a memorial meal was the predominant view of Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) of Zurich, whose approach to the Table came to have wide appeal within Reformed churches.