

Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4

Psalm 119:137-144

2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12

Luke 19:1-10

One of the greatest privileges I have as the Rector of Christ Church Cranbrook is I have the opportunity to do the work of being a priest. Of being with people in the midst of their last days and to bless people as they are dying and to sometimes have the privilege of waiting people with people as their loved one passes away.

This is an incredible privilege for me. It's a holy time. It's a time that crystallizes so much in people's lives. And it's a time that many people don't know about. We live in a culture, as one writer puts it, of lost icons, of points of Revelation that we no longer see anymore and death is one of them. Death is one of those lost icons because we push any mention or signification of death to the margins of our lives.

And I have the privilege of being with people in the midst of this incredible icon which reveals so much. And many times these deaths are difficult. Many times things are incredibly painful. But sometimes there is a moment that reveals almost everything. And that moment comes ironically at a moment of laughter, of a joke that happens in the midst of blessings someone and waiting with them as they die.

Earlier this summer. I had the incredible privilege of being with Jeanne Graham as she made her final journey to her death. And she lived right around the corner. And so, I got to see her often. Whenever I had a moment, I could just jump into the car and get there and see her and come back. And to be honest, these visits did more for me than they may have done for Jeanne because Jeanne was one of those people who had the gift of making you feel like your relationship with her was special.

And I had the kind of belief that my relationship with Jeanne was unlike anybody else's, mine was special. And one time I went to visit her and she was sleeping and I decided that this was such a special moment that I would just kind of blow by the hospice nurse and go in to see her.

I sat down next to her bed and I leaned forward and I whispered, "Is it time to open the presents yet?" And her eyes popped open and she looked over at me and she said, "Let's close our eyes for a few more minutes and then we'll see." And in that moment, we smiled and we chuckled and she reached her hand across and held mine. And in that kind of weird little role reversal where I was the child waiting for Christmas and she was the mother keeping eye over the house, there was a kind of recreation – a re-creation of her life as well as a preparation for eternal life.

This is not the only time that laughter happens in the midst of incredible difficulty in the face of death. Earlier this week I was visiting someone who had made the incredibly courageous decision to enter hospice and to stop fighting her disease. I turned to her as I

was leaving and after having anointed her I said to her, "Don't tell anyone, but you're my favorite." And she said, "Of course. I knew that."

What does it mean to have these kinds of moments of laughter even in death? I want to suggest to you as I just did that there is a connection between resurrection and re-creation and recreation, because you and I do not believe just in any old afterlife as Christians.

We do not believe that we are going to be a disembodied spirit playing a harp somewhere in the nether regions. We believe that there will be a new Heaven and a new Earth, that you and I will receive glorified bodies, which will still be ours, but somehow tell the story of our lives. Much like Jesus had a glorified body that still bore the wounds of his crucifixion and, yet, was able to live and walk and eat fish and to speak and to love and to hold and to be embraced. And this re-creation is often a moment of recreation. It's a moment of joy.

CS Lewis in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* has a moment in the story in which Aslan, the Christ figure, who is raised from the dead. And just before Aslan takes Susan and Lucy to go fight the White Witch, stops for a moment and says to the girls, "Oh children, I feel my strength return to me. Oh children, let us play a game of catch." And Susan and Lucy and Aslan begin to play around the stone where he had been crucified and they end the game with laughter and an embrace.

This is what I mean by the connection between resurrection and re-creation and recreation. This is why Saint Paul in I Corinthians can say with almost laughter that we can see. Oh death, where is thy victory? Oh death, where is thy sting? For you will be perished by the victory of Jesus Christ.

Now I say this all about resurrection. I say this all about death. I say this all about recreation because I want to try to hold together a major point that I want to make today about this Feast Day that we're doing All Saints. Because on All Saints Day, we have a kind of tension, we give thanks for the Saints with a capital S - the people who have been moral and spiritual superheroes, the people who have led spotless lives. And then we also give thanks for the saints with a small s, the people who are complicated people like you and me who struggle and fail and make mistakes and make our way and make our compromises, but somehow still somehow bear witness to the resurrection of God.

And one of the ways in which these two categories of saints come together is in those moments in which each participates powerfully in the resurrection. And the resurrection breaks in not just at death, but at any moment in which we are reborn for God's purposes. It breaks in our baptism, it breaks in at every moment in which we turn and decide to play a kind of infinite game that God has given us thanks to the resurrection.

You see, death is a finite game. Death ends. This is why John Donne writes in his famous poem: death, thou shalt die. But the resurrection is an infinite game. The resurrection is a play that will never end. It will be a play that includes everyone. To say a little bit more about that this category of being in a finite game as opposed to being in an infinite game.

It comes from a scholar of religion named James Carse. He wrote a brilliant book called

*Finite and Infinite Games*. Obviously a brilliant man - not a brilliant coiner of titles. But *Finite and Infinite Games*. And he writes in this powerful first chapter that finite games are games that are bounded with clear rules in which there is a winner and a loser. Whereas infinite games have as their point not winning but keeping the game going.

And where finite games play within boundaries, infinite games play with boundaries. And where finite games follow rules so that there are some external controls to what happens in the game. You can step out of bounds. Infinite games actually have the rules that are constantly flexible and changing because there's an internal energy that keeps them going. And where finite games try to eliminate surprise through strategy, infinite games are created so that surprise can happen and can break out at any moment in the play. And in finite games, there's a focus on the past and a way of somehow limiting the future. In infinite games, there is a focus on the future and the past is employed only to make the game go on in a powerful way.

And so Carse writes, "The joyfulness of infinite play, its laughter lies in learning to start something we cannot finish." The resurrection is the start of something we cannot finish. Death finishes us all, but thanks be to God in Jesus Christ, all who believe in Him live and that is an infinite game. And saints play an infinite game, an infinite game of resurrection.

Now all of this is one way for us to get our hands around what we read today in the Gospel of Luke. This is Jesus's sermon on the plain. It's similar to his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. And running through it all is an invitation to actually see our lives as not simply one of winning and losing but actually part of an infinite game in which all are invited to play.

And so Jesus says blessed are you who are poor because the poor are no longer excluded but are now part of the infinite game of God. Blessed are you who are hungry, for you will be fed when the people of God include everyone in the bounty of what they have earned. Blessed are you who weep because you will find, even in the midst of weeping, laughter and your morning will be turned to joy. And blessed are you when you are rejected, when people will not associate with you, when people will oppress you because God has put in play a new game in which there will never be an outsider or an outcast, but all will be included and everyone will be redeemed. And that is the good news.

In every generation saints have come to somehow bear witness in a powerful way to the work that God is doing in our midst, in this time, in this place. In this church we have a famous saint from the early 4th century, Saint Lucy whose portrait is right inside that tunnel. Saint Lucy is known as a moral superhero who was able to preserve her virginity even in the face of someone who wanted to tempt her or torture her to abandon her faith.

But I want to suggest to you today that to be a saint is to be involved in an infinite game that will constantly be changing. There will be different ways for us to bear witness to Christ in this time and this place. For Carse says that there are two things to note about infinite games or finite games. Both are alike in two ways. They're alike in that we have the freedom to choose the game we're playing. We can choose to play a finite game in our lives or we can choose to play an infinite game.

And then finally no one plays a game alone. We need each other to play a game, whether it is finite or infinite. So you and I are called, I believe, to play an infinite game. And one way to play that infinite game of resurrection - one of the ways we can break out is to maybe be people of empathy. I think it's empathy that closes the distance between the rich and the poor.

I believe it's empathy that closes the distance between those who mourn and those who are comforting them. I believe it's empathy that closes the distance between those who are laughing and those who are weeping. And I believe the saints of our time are called to empathy.

And I placed this sticker in all of your bulletins. This is done by an artist from Northern California named Nicole Lavelle. This is an old school sticker. She wanted to return to some of the ways in which people did stickers in the old days. So it's absolutely difficult to take the back off of it. There's just no way you can do this simply.

And the adhesive is frightening. I think it has adhesives that are probably outlawed in some states. You need to think twice about where you place this sticker. If you place this sticker on your bumper, you will lose paint on your car before you lose this sticker. And if you commit yourself to empathy, realize that everybody who watches you drive is going to be secretly wondering what kind of witness you're providing. Even more than the little fish that Christians might put on their cars, empathy is a powerful point.

So today I offer you this sticker of empathy. Where will you place it? Where will it take you? What distance will it close? Who will you be called to comfort? Who will you be called to support? Who will you be called to laugh with? Who will you be called to be with as they are transformed? As you and your friend are transformed into the person that God has called you and the community that God has called you both to be?

So many have come before us. So many people here, incredible people like Jeanne Graham have gone joyfully to their death, confident in their faith, and full of love in their hearts. And on this day in which we baptize and celebrate death and resurrection, we give thanks to God for God's saints. Those who have been heroes and those who have been people like us. And we give thanks and hope that that spirit which animates all of us might increase. Amen.

[End of Recording]