

Nov. 7, 2010  
All Saints' Day

Luke 20:27-38

### The Audience in the Balcony

When I was a very little girl, I often visited my Grandma and Grandpa who lived in Pasadena. Sometimes I would stay through till Sunday and my Grandma would take me to church with her. Her church was a beautiful old place, and the sanctuary had a balcony, but I didn't know that the first time I went.

We sat down in the bottom section, with the balcony above us. When the choir started singing from the balcony, I thought heaven was opening right above me and the angels were singing!

I looked up to see if they were flying overhead, but they were in the balcony and the balcony was right over my head. Not a single angel came flying forward far enough for me to catch even a glimpse of a wingtip. So I listened as hard as I could. It was beautiful!

Sometimes we think we hear singing or it seems like someone is speaking to us, speaking words of encouragement or love or wisdom, but when we look up, we don't see anyone. Not even a glimpse of a wingtip.

Maybe it's an angel. Or maybe it's someone we love who has passed away----

Someone we miss, someone who was important in our life, someone we long to hear and wish we could see once again.

The choir here doesn't sing from a balcony, but they often sing an introit that begins, "We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, looking on, encouraging us."

"We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses" is from the letter to the Hebrews, chapter 12.

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us."

Today, as we celebrate All Saints' Day, I am thinking about that great cloud of witnesses.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews listed people of the Old Testament who had lived by faith. The list includes Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, Samson, the prophets, and many more.

They were all people who had been obedient to God, who lived by faith even when it got dangerous, even when it was not in their best interest!

So since they never gave up on what God had called them to do, we shouldn't either. After all, they are still here with us, looking on, encouraging us.

And so we need to run with perseverance the race that is set before us, live the life that God has given us, a life that brings us closer and closer to being the people that God wants us to be---people after God's own heart.

In our reading from Luke this morning, Jesus is asked a question by the Sadducees. The Sadducees were a group of Jews who did not believe in resurrection or eternal life. They believed that this life is all you get, so you better live the best life you can, run the best race you can, now! And not wait for the sweet bye and bye.

That is not a bad way to live. We should all be living the best way we can, running the race that is set before us and laying aside the weight of the world and the sin that threatens to tangle us up.

The Sadducees weren't asking the question directly or out of a search for knowledge. They were trying to trap Jesus. The Pharisees, who did believe in resurrection, would be angry if Jesus agreed with the Sadducees, and the Sadducees would be upset if Jesus said 'of course there is resurrection and eternal life.'

Either way, the crowd would end up confused and Jesus would lose some of his following. Either way, the enemies of Jesus would gain.

But Jesus was too smart for that trap. He proved that all people are alive to God, because God is not God of the dead, but of the living.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still alive to God, he says, three of the most important people in Israel's history.

And all of the other people who have died are also still alive to God. Not just the most important people, but all of the saints.

According to the New Testament, all of us are saints. There is no test, no requirement, no waiting period. You don't need to be nominated for doing miracles and you can't turn it down, either.

A saint is anyone who is consecrated to God through Jesus Christ. A saint is anyone who is a Christian.

And so today we celebrate all of us, alive and dead. All of us here together, and all those who have gone before, and all of the saints of every time and place.

We are all children of God, children of the resurrection,  
who will one day be like angels.

Those who already like angels are surrounding us, a great  
cloud of witnesses to the work of the Holy Spirit in us and among  
us.

Sometimes, if I try very hard, I can see them there, in their  
very own balcony, above your heads. People that I never met,  
but that many of you remember, people whose names are in the  
case in the hallway.

The Tysors. Regina Galapon. Max Bravo. Don Simmons.  
So many more, some who taught Sunday School and sang in the  
choir and were on the Trustees and sat in the pews Sunday after  
Sunday.

And the ones we have lost from our midst over the past year---Benny Galapon, Pete Aqui, Darrel Hunstable, Peggy Chasteene, Ed Cain. Others who were important to you and to me---they are all there now, looking on, encouraging us! Cheering us on as we run the race that is set before us! They are like angels up there!

They have not gone somewhere far away. They are looking on!

And so this morning we acknowledge their presence, remembering how important they have been to us, feeling the love that is still between them and us, and knowing that they have been and still are gifts to us of God's tangible love and care. And we are grateful!

We celebrate the lives of these saints who have gone before us into the resurrection life, who showed us the love of God here in this life, and who cheer us on and encourage us from their place in the next life.

We are indeed encouraged to run our race, living the best life that we can, following Christ and doing the will of the Lord to the best of our ability, until we join them in the life to come, taking our place in the balcony.

In the name of Christ, together all the saints say

Amen!