

## **Homily – Dancing and Voting**

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**November 3, 2024 – St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church**

Today we celebrate All Saint and All Souls, a time when we remember those who have gone before. Three times in our church year we focus on death. On Ash Wednesday we remember we are dust and to dust we shall return. On Good Friday we remember the death of Jesus. Two thousand years ago Christ was embodied as a baby boy who grew up and suffered a horrible death at the hands of others. And finally today with All Saints and All Souls we remember the death of our loved ones. For many, this is the hardest death to embrace, but as we get into our eighties and nineties this happens pretty frequently. We all die including each and every one our loved ones. Death is something that comes for all of us and our spiritual journeys are considerably advanced when we remember and embrace death.

But, let me lighten the mood for a moment with three Woody Allen quotes. First, "I am not afraid of death. I just don't want to be there when it happens." And, "I don't want to achieve immortality through my work. I want to achieve it through not dying." And finally, Woody Allen said, "When I die, all I want is just a few of my good friends to gather around the casket, and do everything in their power to bring me back to life"

Today's Gospel reading, shows us that Jesus had this super power of bringing people back to life. This miracle happens several times in the Gospels with the story of Lazarus being the best know. However, sadly, this is a superpower that most of us don't have. Yes, miracles happen, but all of us and all of our loved ones die. In the last two months we have had seven deaths here at St. Barnabas. Bob Hawkins, John Konopka, Janis Johnson's mother Gladys, Angie Maldonado's father Lorenzo, Sam Agbo, Mike Marren, and finally this past week Leslie Campbell's husband Gary. Many of you have experienced death and some of you may even be awaiting death. As the saying goes, the human mortality rate still hovers very close to one hundred percent.

Two weeks ago, Barbara Holmes died. She was a pastor and teacher at the Center for Action and Contemplation. Among other things she was known for her cloud of witnesses and how we are all connected to the ancestors and those who have gone before. On this All Saints and All Souls Sunday I want to spend the next several minutes sharing the words of Barbara Holmes. She starts with a quote from the great twentieth century American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr.

"Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we

do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint. Therefore we must be saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness.

Barbara Holmes goes on to say, that for her these words of Reinhold Niebuhr ring true. Although we wish it was otherwise, the struggle for justice is never completed in one lifetime or one rebellion. The shifting of systems, the turning of hearts, the forgiveness of oppressions and the dissipation of anger (righteous or not) takes time. It is not easy to confront injustice. It requires solidarity and the inevitable loss of life. It requires that each generation affirm, that we are ready to be free by any peaceful means necessary. We cannot always see the path toward the common good; often it seems that evil has won the day, and sometimes the leap of faith required to bridge chasms of disagreement seems to be a desperate choice. And yet, even during our worst times, there are opportunities to facilitate human flourishing through the creative exchanges of ideas, authenticity, culture, and religious expression.

Holmes goes on to connect spiritual practice with the common good. She says, for me a spiritual practice that matters includes social renewal. Instead of blaming others about the state of our union, instead of blaming one political party or another, we can reflect on our own complicity and support of systems that abandon the poor, warehouse our children in failing schools, and fail to provide adequate health care. As a spiritual practice, we can wake up to the possibility of building a new order. We can improvise those possibilities; try them out in the creative microcosm of a shared public life, realizing that our way of life could be improved so that all members of society thrive.

Holmes says: I believe that as a spiritual practice we can imagine and create “a political system responsive to the people and respectful of global neighbors, a health system that is comprehensive in scope and not profit driven, an educational system shaped by innovation, improvisation, technology, and practicality.” Holmes concludes by asking Can we be honest now about what is not working? Can we re-envision new options? And she answers, I believe that we can, if we want to.

The work here at St. Barnabas, the work here in our communities, the work of our nation is a flow from our ancestors, to our descendants. Sometimes it seems like the creation of God’s kingdom here on earth is a dance, a dance which is two steps forward and one step back. It is a dance that we pick up from those who have gone before, and we pass on the dance to those who come after. It is the dance of decades or even centuries. It is a dance with God, and it is a dance with others. Jesus calls us to this dance so that, as I said a moment ago, we can help to bring God’s kingdom here on earth. God’s kingdom is not just for the next life, it is for this life also. Throughout

the generations we are moving the needle forward so that more and more are able to see the beauty of God which is already around us. So, what are you doing to build on the beauty that was before and enable the greater beauty that will be after us?

Now, the elections on Tuesday are a splendid way for us to enter into this intergenerational dance, and there are three points I want to make about the elections. First, get out and vote. Don't sit out the elections. Don't be passive. Vote. On Tuesday, we have a polling station here at St. Barnabas in our parish hall. So vote. On Tuesday, we will also have the church open for prayer and we will have a Peace Gathering at 3pm as we pray for the elections and for peace.

Second, vote in a way that is constant with God. Yesterday, St. Barnabas once again served at People's Kitchen. Before we serve the lunch, we have a church service which included intercessory prayer, and we prayed for the elections. Specifically, we prayed that we are able to see and experience God in those who are elected. Now, both Donald Trump and Kamala Harris are the beloved of God. They are both made in the image of God just like we are. However, a choice needs to be made that is consistent with the values of Jesus. I ask you to include God as you make your ballot decisions. Vote, not for your own self-interest, but for the person who you think will bring God's kingdom a little more into this world.

And third, as the elections conclude advocate for a and live into a non-violent way of being. The way of Jesus is the way of non-violence. It is not passive, and it is not to act as a doormat. But, Jesus equated non-violence with the kingdom of God. Over and over Jesus taught that we should not acquiesce to oppression but we should also not react violently. Rather, find a third way, a way that is neither submission nor assault, flight nor fight, a way that can secure your human dignity and begin to change the power equation.

Now, nonviolence is not a way of avoiding personal sacrifice. Indeed, it requires that we take that sacrifice on ourselves rather than inflicting it on others. It demands a heroism that a surprisingly large number of people are prepared to shoulder.

Furthermore, nonviolence can be misconstrued as a way of avoiding conflict. Christians have all too often called for "nonviolence" when they, unfortunately, really meant tranquility. But in fact, nonviolence seeks out conflict, elicits conflict, even initiates conflict, in order to bring it out into the open and lance its poisonous sores. Conflict may move the dance forward. However, violence, in any form, is a backwards step in the dance of the kingdom of God.

So vote, include God in your voting choices, and commit to a way of non-violence no matter what happens on or after Tuesday.

In this way we each do our own part to move the dance of our ancestor forward so that our descendants can also work to bring forth the kingdom of God. From generation to generation to generation may we make God's world a more beautiful creation for those who come after.

*Note: Some of the content about non-violence was taken from or based on Walter Wink's book "The Powers that Be."*