

“Embraced by Resurrection Love”

Psalms 107, Revelation 21:1-6, John 1:5, 1 Corinthians 13:8, Romans 8:38, John 11:25, Matthew 5:4

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I hope you had a happy and inspiring All Hallows' Eve, All Saints' Day and All Soul's day. Every Sunday we celebrate resurrection a mini Easter. The church calendar has two three-day seasons, celebrations of resurrection, three successive days, in which something holy and mysterious is going on. One is Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday. The other always begins on October 31 and ends on November 2 when we celebrate that light will overcome darkness, life will overcome death, the resurrection of those who have lived on earth and the future resurrection of those now living on earth.

The secularization of Christmas is debated. Why is the secularization of All Hallows' Eve not given equal attention? Historically unlike Advent and Lent where Christians were encouraged to fast, All Hallows' Eve, All Saints and All Souls were to be a time of feasting and sharing bountiful food, this evolved into the giving of candy. Family, friends, and neighbors gathered to assure each other that love and community is overcoming fear and division; this evolved into costumes and scaring each other.

Many church historians believe this time of year was chosen, because the earth is becoming barren, brown, and drab. Daylight is fleeting. Death seems to be in the air. Time to remember and celebrate the power of resurrection, life overcomes death, light overcomes darkness, love overcomes fear and hate, a vibrant beautiful warm spring lies on the other side of winter.

John declared resurrection, **John 1:5 NLT “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish the light.”** The Apostle Paul writes volumes about the power of resurrection love including, **1 Corinthians 13:8 NLT “love will last forever!”** and **Romans 8:38 NLT “nothing can ever separate us from God’s love.”** Jesus proclaimed resurrection, **John 11:25 NLT “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying.”** John had a vision of resurrection. **Revelation 21:1-6 NLT “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, “Look, God’s home is now among God’s people! God will live with them, and they will be God’s people. God will be with them. God will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.” And the one sitting on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new!” And then God said to me, “Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true.” And God also said, “It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life.**

The psalmist sings of resurrection that redeems us and the entire cosmos. God transforms death and all that diminishes life into joyful, abundant life. The psalmist sings of resurrection for wanderers, prisoners, and fools; resurrection for the sick, shipwrecked and the earth; resurrection for the hungry, farmers, and the poor. The psalms are prayers; so often God gets blamed for our predicaments. Often there is a section where the psalmist thinks God is the one who punishes people. Sometimes a section where the psalmist wishes harm for the hateful. These prayers often resonate with our struggle to make sense of misfortunate and hate. Notice the end, and read the psalms as a whole for eventually the psalmist always gets to a place of worship, realizing that God is love, God heals all, God resurrects all. **Psalm 107 NLT “Give thanks to the Lord, for God is good! God’s faithful love endures forever. Has the Lord redeemed you? Then speak out! Tell others God has redeemed you from your enemies. For God has gathered the exiles from many lands, from east and west, from north and south. Some wandered in the wilderness, lost and homeless. Hungry and thirsty, they nearly died. “Lord, help!” they cried in their trouble, and God rescued them from their distress. God led them straight to safety, to a city where they could live. Let them praise the Lord for God’s great love and for the wonderful things God has done for them. For God satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things. Some sat in darkness and deepest gloom, imprisoned in iron chains of misery. They rebelled against the words of God, scorning the counsel of the Most High. That is why God broke them with hard labor; they fell, and no one was there to help them. “Lord, help!” they cried in their trouble, and God**

saved them from their distress. God led them from the darkness and deepest gloom; God snapped their chains. Let them praise the Lord for God's great love and for the wonderful things God has done for them. For God broke down their prison gates of bronze; God cut apart their bars of iron. Some were fools; they rebelled and suffered for their sins. They couldn't stand the thought of food, and they were knocking on death's door. "Lord, help!" they cried in their trouble, and God saved them from their distress. God sent out God's word and healed them, snatching them from the door of death. Let them praise the Lord for God's great love and for the wonderful things God has done for them. Let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and sing joyfully about God's glorious acts. Some went off to sea in ships, plying the trade routes of the world. They, too, observed the Lord's power in action, God's impressive works on the deepest seas. God spoke, and the winds rose, stirring up the waves. Their ships were tossed to the heavens and plunged again to the depths; the sailors cringed in terror. They reeled and staggered like drunkards and were at their wits' end. "Lord, help!" they cried in their trouble, and God saved them from their distress. God calmed the storm to a whisper and stilled the waves. What a blessing was that stillness as God brought them safely into harbor! Let them praise the Lord for God's great love and for the wonderful things God has done for them. Let them exalt God publicly before the congregation and before the leaders of the nation. God changes rivers into deserts, and springs of water into dry, thirsty land. God turns the fruitful land into salty wastelands, because of the wickedness of those who live there. But God also turns deserts into pools of water, the dry land into springs of water. God brings the hungry to settle there and to build their cities. They sow their fields, plant their vineyards, and harvest their bumper crops. How God blesses them! They raise large families there, and their herds of livestock increase. When they decrease in number and become impoverished through oppression, trouble, and sorrow, the Lord pours contempt on their princes, causing them to wander in trackless wastelands. But God rescues the poor from trouble and increases their families like flocks of sheep. The godly will see these things and be glad, while the wicked are struck silent. Those who are wise will take all this to heart; they will see in our history the faithful love of the Lord."

After Lazarus died and before Jesus rose Lazarus from the dead, Jesus wept. Jesus wept from heartfelt grief over the death of his friend. Jesus wept over the pain, fear, discord, hate, sickness, loss, and death that scars God's wonderful, good, loving, joyous creation. Jesus wept over every tear shed by every person. Jesus wept for you, for your struggles, loss, pain, sadness, grief, sickness, burdens, and tears. Jesus wept for every moment you do not feel loved, whole, complete, joyous, eternal. Jesus said, **Matthew 5:4 NLT "God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted."** Jesus comforted the family and friend of Lazarus by restoring Lazarus' earthly life. Jesus came to assure us that God will resurrect us from everything, that God will resurrect us to eternal life, that God will make every sinner a saint. Soren Kierkegaard said, "God creates out of nothing. Wonderful, you say. Yes, to be sure, but God does what is still more wonderful: God makes saints out of sinners." God purifies us sort of like a refiner's fire. Think of someone you love who has journeyed through the horizon of earthly death to the glory of heaven. /// I am thinking of my mother. God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Comfort comes from visualizing how those in heaven have been purified, made saints. My mom had a temper; I visualize that as her passion for life. My mom worried; I visualize that as joy over seeing how God transforms all. My mom argued with me; I visualize that as her love for me, for her caring for me, wanting to spend more time with me. My mom was stubborn; I visualize that as desire for all to be right on earth. In this silence think of how God purified, made a saint of, that person you just thought of in heaven. ///

God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Comfort comes from realizing love, joy, and goodness in every form endures forever. That you will savor all of that with everyone you love in heaven. Enjoying delicious food with my mom. Playing pong, checkers, Atari, and games with my mom. Seeing mom's delight in my accomplishments. Being safe in my mom's hug. Laughing with my mom. In this silence visualize yourself savoring love with that person you just thought of in heaven. ///

All Hallows' Eve the celebration of peace, light, love, joy, life overcoming all. All Saints is the celebration of the resurrection of all who have lived on earth. All Souls Day is the celebration of God's resurrecting power in us and through us.

Peter Woods writes, "Jesus himself weeps at his dead friend's tomb. And then Jesus calls forth life and liberation from the hopeless hole, on the hopeless day, amidst a

hopeless crowd. Jesus calls forth life in the midst of certain confirmed, putrefied, and stinking death. I don't quite know what to make of this narrative. Year after year I look at it, and the deep mystery of this event continues to cloud round me like soupy fog. All I know is that I have been hopeless before. At the back of the line, waiting, and waiting. Praying and praying. Willing and willing. And then somewhere just after the third day, I have given up. I have resigned. I have resented. It is finished. It's too late! In the dark of failed relationships, failed programs for happiness, failed dreams of beauty and happy endings. In the entombed hopeless reality of life's darkness, I have heard an untimely voice. A voice that called my name. Just like Lazarus, for me life and liberation came, through the tears of Jesus and the torment of my hopelessness. I was able to stand up, against all the odds, and I understood the meaning of Lazarus' name. It means, "God has helped." No one else could have helped, but God has helped. On the fourth hopeless day, God has helped. "Now untie me and let me go!"

Bara Barbara Brown Taylor has written "when you look at Jesus, you see God. When you listen to Jesus, you hear God. Not because he has taken God's place, but because Jesus is the clear window God has glazed into flesh and blood—the porthole between this world and the next, the passageway between heaven and earth."

All Soul's Day invites us to see the power of resurrection in our daily life. We all journey through dark, cold, drab times, the valley of the shadow of death. Life is a journey. God will never leave us. God will not allow us to get stuck in the shadow of death. God leads us, if needed carries us, to green pastures with refreshing streams of peace, joy, light, and love. On the other side of winter is always a warm spring bursting with life, blessings, eternal joys, and enduring loves.

We celebrate the power of God's love to resurrect all. We celebrate the resurrection of those we love. We celebrate God restoring our daily life. Embraced in the promise of eternal resurrection love we praise God along with saints in all ages. Let us rejoice and be glad. Amen