

Sermon: The Beginning, The Ending and The Middle

Year B, All Saints

Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9; Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 24; Revelation 21:1-6a; John 11:32-44

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Where are you from? I come from an old New England family, full of farmers and ministers. My grandmother lives in Chennai, India. We have a family farm in Pepperell. I grew up in Taiwan, Colorado, New Jersey, Vermont, Nashua, right here in Brookline.

Where are you headed? More ministry, though I'm the primary caregiver for my folks. To rock kindergarten. To find the right college. Get the kids grown and gone. Retire here and winter in Florida. Finally have time to read, to garden, to play music, to get my commercial pilot license, to really master puff pastry.

Why do we tell these stories about where we're from and where we're headed? Because they give a frame to our lives, to our understanding of the world. Sometimes we tell those stories so people can understand what set us on the trajectory our lives have taken. Sometimes we tell those stories so people can understand why we are putting so much effort into changing the trajectory we were launched on.

Why tell those stories in church? All those Saints whose names we lifted up, both out loud and in our hearts, in our greeting to one another this morning, they are a part of who we are. Their reality formed who we are. Our love for them and from them changed the people we are today because we knew them. Those Saints are a reminder that love changes lives, and those lives change the world.

But we tell those stories in church for another reason. The Bible has an answer when we ask "where are we from?" *First this: God created the Heavens and Earth—all you see, all you don't see. Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness.* (Genesis 1:1, *The Message*) All we see, all we don't see, it all came from God. The Bible has an answer when we ask "where are we going?" "*Look! Look! God has moved into the neighborhood, making his home with men and women!*" (Revelation 21:3) God has moved into the neighborhood. We will end our life living on the same street as God.

We begin in God and we end in God. And in between, God calls us to love our neighbors as ourselves. The Saints we have named today gave us skills and talents and resources to help us meet that Call. Or they gave us none of that. Those Saints in their brokenness gave us the opportunity to offer true forgiveness in the depths of our hearts, not to excuse what they did, but to allow us to move forward and leave their damage behind us. We need all those things: skills, talents, resources, and especially forgiveness. We need all those things if we are to love our neighbor as ourselves.

On Tuesday, we will have an opportunity to work together on that project of loving our neighbors as ourselves. We can vote. If loving your neighbor means more guns, vote. If loving your neighbor means less guns, vote. Or health insurance or environmental protections or the right to sue the government or the right to privacy. Your Saints and your life has led you to an understanding of how to love your neighbor.

Remember this too. It took a lot to get women and non-whites and non-property owners the right to vote. And if we go back far enough, we were mostly just serfs on some aristocrat's land. Or

we lived on this land before it was taken from us. But someone, at some point in time, had to see us as a neighbor who needed the right to vote. We see those Saints as neighbors by exercising the right to vote they insisted we were entitled to.

Look, I know. One Tuesday night, as we watch the returns, there will be almost no sign that anyone is loving anyone's neighbor. No matter where you are on the political spectrum, your TV station will have on some token nutball from the other side, so you can marvel at Those People Who So Completely Do Not Get It. That's exactly why I'm urging you to vote.

Because in the midst of all the brutality and ugliness that is coming, and it's coming, our community needs people who voted out of love. I know I am only one of a thousand voices calling on you to vote. But while everyone else is calling on you to vote to show your support for the Republic, I want to remind you that, if you choose to step into the voting booth with it in your heart, you can show your support for the Kingdom.

Our community needs people who voted with skills, talents, resources, and forgiveness, especially forgiveness. In the midst of all that is coming, we need Saints. Saints who voted, remembering where they came from and where they are going. Saints who voted who remember that *God created the Heavens and Earth—all you see, all you don't see*. Saints who voted who remember that *God will move into the neighborhood, making his home with men and women!* Saints who voted because they remember that we begin and end in God's love and in the middle we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves.