

November 6, 2022 All Saints' Sunday

Ladue Chapel Presbyterian Church

First Corinthians 13:9-13, Ephesians 1:11-23

"Our Collective Inheritance"

Douglas T. King

The family is ushered into a dark paneled office. They sit down in chairs gathered around a big wooden desk behind which are endless bookshelves filled with legal times. An elderly gentleman in a three-piece suit sits at the desk. Once everyone is settled, he begins, "The following is the last will and testament of..." There is tension in the air. Everyone wondering who will get what and how much. Everyone hoping for what they believe is their fair share of the inheritance. An inheritance can be life changing. Who will get the mansion? Who will get the stocks and bonds? Whatever one person receives, the other person will not receive.

In today's text from Ephesians we hear word of an inheritance. And today, as we celebrate All Saints' Sunday, we consider the nature of the inheritance we are receiving. Today is the day we remember and celebrate those who have gone on before us to greater glory; those who have died and who now live eternally with their God. On this day we often think of specific persons and what they shared of themselves with each of us individually.

But the inheritance spoken of in Ephesians is not of an individual sort. It is not one where if you get something I do not. It is a collective word. This inheritance with which we

are being gifted is communal. This inheritance is welcoming us all home as a community. And not just welcoming us home but transforming us. Together we are promised wisdom and revelation that the "eyes of our heart will be enlightened."

The lectionary does not pair this text with the Corinthians text but I do. I always think of the verse, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known." Note that this text too speaks to what we receive in the plural; of what we will see, the divine face-to-face, together. This is a journey we share and a reward we share.

When I served a church in Buffalo, our organist, Thomas, was a very good friend of mine. We shared a special brand of wicked humor and great respect. He had much to teach me during our time serving together. His wisdom was a great inheritance to me. When he eventually went into hospice care I was a part of a small group of friends that kept vigil by his bedside during those final days. When he died, one of our group was with him and told us of how, as he took his final breath his eyes opened with a look of most expansive and absolute wonder.

Now there may very well be a biological cause for this occurrence but for me it always brings to mind these texts from Corinthians and Ephesians. I envision Thomas, who committed his entire life to creating beautiful music to praise and reflect the glory of God, finally experiencing all of the divine beauty and glory he could only receive in shadows and whispers on this side of existence. I envision that dim mirror being whisked away and finding himself face to face with the one who created, redeemed, and sustained him. I envision the eyes of his heart

enlightened to all of the mysteries of the universe and gasping with utter delight.

This is the inheritance and destiny we share. As we make our way through these days we get a mere foretaste of our inheritance, an amuse bouche preceding the feast we will receive together at table with the Lord. When we leave this earthly life and return to the one who created us our full inheritance will be writ large before us.

Right now we are fully known by our God but we do not fully know God. Then God's glory will envelope us in its entirety. Together we will fully comprehend just how powerful God's loving and healing grace truly is. And this grace will transform us. The challenge for us is to be patient and trusting as we await this promised transformation.

In my life I have lived in a variety of cities, San Diego, Tijuana, Charlotte, Brooklyn, Buffalo, Manhattan, and now Saint Louis in the Central West End. I enjoy cities for a variety of reasons but one of the reasons that may surprise you is that I love cities for all of the construction. Cities are always full of scaffolding and cranes, jackhammers thundering away and steel girders rising to the sky.

At the moment I am enjoying watching the work being done to create a new building for Barnes-Jewish hospital on Kingshighway. Construction always starts with digging down deep and preparing to lay a foundation. This portion of construction always takes a long time and you can see very little outward progress. It feels like nothing is really happening. But then, when the foundation is set I am always amazed at how quickly the frame of the building rises from below the ground and makes its inexorable climb toward the skies.

So why does all of that noise and bother intrigue me so? Because I find it an apt metaphor for each of us and all of us together. We are under construction. We have yet to be completed. We are in need of being built into more of whom we were created to be. We are in need of a transformation only God's grace can work upon us. And there are times when it feels as if we are making little progress, just like those buildings that are having their foundations laid deep below the surface.

But this holy day of All Saints', and our texts from Corinthians and Ephesians are a reminder that although we may experience construction delays on our journey, our inheritance is guaranteed; the construction will be completed; one day the eyes of our hearts will be enlightened and by the gift of God's grace we will rise up stand among the great community of the saints. We will share in this glory together. We will share in this completion of construction; in this life-changing inheritance. We will share in this with each other, with all those who came before us, and with all those who will come after us.

In this passage from Ephesians we hear about the community of the saints to whom we are inextricably linked. In New York City we lived two blocks from Fifth Avenue. And every year the route of the marathon would include Fifth Avenue. We would go and stand on the sidewalk in the midst of the crowds and cheer the runners as they entered the final leg of the race. We would hoot and holler and do everything we could to lift their spirits so they could finish. Coincidentally the race was always run on the first Sunday in November which meant it always fell on All Saints' Sunday.

When we hear about this inheritance we share with all of the saints who came before us we should picture ourselves as those marathoners running their race. We all know life can be hard, at times it can be exhausting. But as we wait upon our collective inheritance; as we continue to be under construction; we have all of those saints on the sideline cheering us on. They know the foundation being laid for us will allow us to be raised up to extraordinary heights together. We cannot see the finish line just yet but those saints have been there and they are hooting and hollering for us as we continue our journey.

We may grow tired as we make our way through this life. We may wonder if we are making any progress in being constructed into whom we were created to be. We may feel like we are alone on the journey. We may lose sight of our goal. But we have been promised an inheritance of God's grace we will share in together. One day the eyes of our heart will indeed be enlightened and we will see all of God's grace and God's glory before us. And as we journey toward our inheritance we are being cheered on, every step of the way, by that great company of the saints who have now finished their race.

Thanks be to God. Amen.