

All Saints' Sunday (and Saturday)
November 5 & 6, 2005
Sermon by Timothy A. Leitzke

I was driving up Interstate 95 from Baltimore on Monday and a big white car pulled up behind me and then scooted into the left lane to pass me. The driver honked the horn. I was immediately taken aback. I was in the middle lane. What more did this person want? I glanced left and saw the driver gesticulating, so I risked a full look in that direction. I saw a woman who, with a delighted smile on her face, mouthed "I went to Roanoke!" She had seen my Roanoke College sticker in my rear window. There was a connection, however loose. We were close enough in age that we probably knew or studied under some of the same professors. We were from different places on our way to different places, but we were knit together by a common experience.

The Prayer of the Day for All Saints opens with the words, "Almighty God, whose people are knit together..." It is one of my favorite images. We are all knit into a single fabric. The many threads of many colors form one great cloth. Pull at one end of the fabric and you pull at the whole thing. Anything that affects one of the Saints affects all of the Saints. We can wrap the fabric around us, covering ourselves in the warm embrace of All the Saints. When a Saint dies, we remain knit to them. They are no longer with us but their threads wind through ours and continue to influence the shape that our threads, our lives, take and will take.

Of course, in this metaphor the knitter is God. Moreover, the yarn is from God, so that all that we are comes from God, the greatest knitter of them all. I'm

blessed to be the descendant of a crocheting mother and *her* knitting mother, and to be dating a knitting woman. Nice blankets are never sparse in my house, but they would be if I did not know the knitters. It's starting to get cooler at night and I'm finally sleeping under blankets. There's only so much of the blanket that I can touch at one time. It's cold. I don't want to move out from under the blanket, and it's dark so if I move I do so on the faith that there is blanket beyond what I can touch. I have to trust that the knitter did her work. We, the Church on Earth, the Living Saints, live in a cold dark night, warmed by and part of covers that are still being knit. We can only feel part of the blanket. We don't know for sure what lies beyond our grasp, and we don't know what will get knit next.

Do we know our knitter? Do we know what happens to the threads of the blanket that have passed beyond our reach? Death is something close to us all, and especially in recent days in this congregation. There is no immunity to it. Age—while a factor—is not a controlling factor. Death is a condition of life. Death is neither bad nor good. Death *IS*. My grandmother died in August. I remain knit to my grandmother by blood and by the impressions that she made on my mother and me, but she has passed beyond my reach, and in this world that passing is permanent. I can't feel that part of the blanket. The Knitter promises us that we are the Knitter's Children, that we are still knit to those who have died, and that when we die we will still be connected to the Knitter. The Knitter promises this in baptism. In the water and the word God promises that while we will one day be

separated from others we are never separated from God. The threads that are beyond our grasp remain in the Knitter's grasp.

The world does not know this. The World thinks that death is the end, or that our ghosts stalk the earth, or, in ultimate human pretension, that somehow our souls are by virtue of themselves immortal and that when we die our souls will sprout wings and take a graceful ascent to live forever in the clouds. The Church itself invented a "purgatory" where your soul would be purified before going to heaven. The world comes up with these ideas because the world does not know God. The world does not know its Knitter; it does not know the truth that God the Knitter reveals. In Jesus the Christ God reveals boundless, saving love for all creation. The world does not know Christ, but *we* are Friends of Christ, made Friends of Christ in baptism. By the baptismal promise that we are God's Children, by Christ's faith, by the words of the Law and the Prophets, by the witness of the Gospels and the apostles, by the story of Christ's resurrection we know our Knitter and the resurrection that our Knitter has in store for us.

In the words of the First Letter of John, "Beloved, we are God's Children now. It has not yet appeared what we shall be." Through the many signs God gives us, from baptism to Christ himself, we know that we are God's Children, part of the fabric that God has knit through the whole course of time. We don't know the pattern. This past week in Weekday Spirituality we read Philip Yancey's brief bio on Frederick Buechner, a Presbyterian Minister and author. Yancey quotes Buechner as saying that, "God gives us only 'momentary glimpses into a mystery

of such depth, power and beauty that if we were to see it head on, in any way other than glimpses, I suspect we would be annihilated.” This is not a horrific threat but a glorious promise. The joy of beholding God is so great that our mortal bodies cannot contain it. We could not now handle being as happy as we will be.

“We know that when Christ appears we shall be like he is, because we shall see him just as he is.” In other words, on the day that we fully behold the risen Christ we will be able to handle the joy of God. We will have been raised. We will be imperishable, immortal. We remain for now children. You cannot know what we will look like in the resurrection. It’s like looking at a baby picture and guessing what the 40 year old will look like. You can guess; you cannot know.

We cannot know; we hope. “And everyone who is having this hope on Christ purifies himself, just as he is pure.” Faith alone is our ticket to the resurrection, and faith itself is God’s gift to us. Friends of Christ, at the Resurrection God will call your name. I don’t know what it is going to look like, but we can trust in this good news because of Christ’s Resurrection. We do not know the fabric beyond what we can touch in this dark, cold night, but God has promised us that God remembers every thread, that in God we are knit together with All the Saints—whether close to us, just passing by on the highway, or distant beyond measure—and that on the last day we will behold the finished blanket in all its glory. Thanks be to the Knitter. Thanks be to God. Amen.