

On this All Saints Sunday our Scripture lessons invite us to ponder the power of resurrection that we have been given by God – that as children of God we are all given – because death is not the final word...not for saints of God – not for any of us who kneel at the feet of Jesus the way that Martha and Mary did when their brother Lazarus died.

Instead, our hope lies in a God who is described in Revelation as “making all things new” and who “wipes away every tear from our eyes.” This great and wonderful hope, however, does not negate our suffering or the pain of sin and death in this life. Suffering, it seems to me, is part of the “first things” described in Revelation. The first things, but not the second. Still... death is real. Losses are real. Suffering is real and this is demonstrated in the tears and anguish of Mary and Martha in our Gospel story when their brother dies ... and notice that even Jesus himself cries with grief at the tomb of Lazarus even though Jesus knows he is about to give him new life and raise him up from the dead through the awesome power of God. Likewise, we are called upon to grieve with those, as Jesus does, who suffer and mourn. Just over a week ago our Jewish brothers and sisters in Pittsburgh were stricken by tragedy when a shooter entered their House of Worship – and shot 11 of their members dead. Vigils and prayer services were held around the country including here in San Diego and many from our Diocese participated or spread the word. It is imperative that we, as Christians, stand in solidarity with the Jewish community in this tragedy – that we grieve with them and pray for them, just as in every tragedy. This is part of our call. And so while the incredible promise and hope of resurrection brings us deep comfort, it does not nullify or excuse the reality of the suffering we all face in our lives or the necessity to grieve with one another in the face of loss.

But our God is a God who is in the business of constantly bringing new life and resurrection out of death. Even this season of Fall reminds us of this beautiful truth... a grand reminder of this universal principle – as the leaves turn colors and fall and die, they nourish the ground beneath them, and we know the trees will burst with new life again as they bud and bloom in the spring, out of death comes new life- every change ushers a new way of being...and this is the cycle of death and resurrection that we are all

apart of – where death is never the final word, as the lives of the saints all testify.

And if resurrection seems like an obscure concept, think for a moment about all the experiences of loss and new life you have experienced in your own life. As a parent, I recognize the experience of a loss or “death” of each new phase of my children’s lives: where the preciousness of infancy is lost forever to be replaced by the wonder of toddlerhood and then toddlerhood is lost forever and replaced by childhood, which is lost to teenage-hood and young adulthood and so on. I always cry when I have to replace my children’s clothing that they have outgrown in their dressers and closets ...boxing up the precious clothes that carry with them such sweet memories, never to be worn again. The loss is real. As each new phase fades away, it can be hard for parents to let go, and yet it is always replaced by something new and often pretty wonderful --but so very different from the last stage. My teenager will never be the tiny, fragile angelic baby I used to cradle. And I know parents feel this most keenly when their children first leave home. And so parenting is full of grief in that sense, of suffering losses again and again but also of a joyful resurrection as each new phases emerges. And this truth can apply to almost anything in our lives – each change we ourselves experience, whether for good or ill, is a death of some kind and opens up to us new vistas and opportunities-to new life and resurrection. It is a theme that resounds throughout the ages.

I remember as a child being greatly impacted after reading the story of Joni Eareckson Tada – a woman that became a quadraplegic after a diving accident as a teenager. She felt as though she had almost literally died- life as she knew it stopped completely and her depression almost totally consumed her as she laid in the hospital unable to move. But even in the midst of this tragedy, she went on to discover a whole new life- slowly she began to rely on God for help and strength...and eventually she became an artist, a writer, and a public speaker with a ministry that reaches people internationally as she touches the lives of anyone who has ever experienced a loss they didn’t think they could get past. She has said she’d rather be in her chair and know God than on her feet without God. But our losses don’t need to be that dramatic to see the power of resurrection in our lives – it may be the shift we experience from a sickness to

restored or changed health...or the shift from living with an addiction to being freed from it, or the shift from losing a relationship to rediscovering singlehood or even a new relationship or re-marriage. I know my divorce has been like a death and resurrection for me in many ways – the pain and loss of my marriage that, with God’s grace, has actually brought me into a place of deep personal healing.

But for the past few years when I think of resurrection I recall the event that occurred to me 2 years ago on a sunny day in Portland, Oregon. I had been out grocery shopping with my son Graysen who was 2 years old at the time. When we got home I parked on the street and then schlepped my groceries up the sidewalk and the long outdoor staircase into the house with Graysen toddling behind me. When I opened the front door I heard my phone ring. I stepped inside and put the heavy groceries down to answer it and started chatting with my sister. Possibly 1 whole minute passed when I noticed that Graysen wasn’t in the house yet – I was sure he was still doddling outside on the sidewalk or on the stairs, so I poked my head outside the door to look for him and tell him to hurry up – but he wasn’t there. Puzzled, I thought maybe he had walked in the house behind me and I had missed him, but I was almost certain that wasn’t the case. Still I called out into the house but no answer. I asked Charlotte to check the house for me as I went outside to look again – still no sign of him. I began yelling out his name, “Graysen!” I looked in the front yard, down the side walk, and in the car- no sign of him anywhere. My yelling began to become panicked – “Graysen!” I screamed, “Graysen!” as loud as my lungs would permit. Still nothing and no response. I started wondering how he could be out of earshot already? It had been just 1 minute since he had been standing on the sidewalk while I was on the phone. I started running down the street in either direction yelling, becoming hoarse – knowing there was no way a 2-year old’s little legs could have carried all that far. I kept screaming and neighbors came outside to assist, but there was no response and no sign of my little blond toddler anywhere. I ran back in the house frantically, then back outside again, but my boy had completely vanished. My mind was racing and my heart was pounding (all you parents know exactly what I’m talking about) – then a chilling thought came over me –a 2 year old can’t disappear that quickly on their own – had he been abducted? I

thought back carefully through the events: while I was on the phone he had been outside on the sidewalk – I remembered hearing the sound of car’s engine in the front of the house, and then the sound of the idling engine – had it stopped and picked him up? Dear God, I thought – no. The adrenaline surged through me along with a terrible feeling of growing terror. The neighbors searched the yard and streets all around us, but he was not there – none of us could find him. My boy was gone. About 15 or 20 minutes had passed since the search began. Then one of the neighbors looked right at me and said, “It’s time to call the police and file a missing person’s report. A 2-year-old doesn’t just vanish like this. We have to get the police involved now and not waste any more time.” The full weight of what was happening hit me and a thought came with such force that I’ll never forget it or how I felt. I thought, “This is the moment my life changes forever. My life will now be divided into 2 parts- the first half, before I lost him, and the second half, after he went missing.” If thoughts could stop the heart, this one hit with me with that kind of force and I nearly collapsed. She dialed the police on her cell phone and handed it to me. I started making the report, stammering my way through it, my hands shaking, explaining every detail...his date of birth, his appearance, our location, what he was wearing. It was absolutely surreal. I started begging God for help internally “Help us, help us, help us.” And then something urged me to look inside the car one more time. We had looked before but then I opened the door and pushed the latch on the seat to the back row– and then I saw it - his little body crumpled up in a ball on the floor, hidden from view, hiding and scared. I grabbed him, held him, and looked at him – his eyes were wide and wild with fear – as I cradled him in my arms I fell onto my knees on the sidewalk, rocking him, and sobs came out of me that I didn’t know existed. The neighbors began to cry too. We don’t know for sure what had happened or why he never responded – but at some point he had become scared and hid and, perhaps, hearing the fear in our voices caused him to stay silent in case he was in trouble. He cried, I cried, we all cried, and I said repeatedly, “Thank you God, thank you God, thank you God.” The neighbors took the phone and told the police he had been found. And it washed over me: my son was okay, he was no longer lost – but it felt like a small glimpse of death and resurrection in less than 30 minute’s time.

The promise of resurrection: the promise of death giving way to new life, just as it did for Lazarus and his sisters, is for all of us – we have all been called to be saints in God's Kingdom, a Kingdom where death cannot hold us, a Kingdom where death cannot contain God's people. A Kingdom where we will get second chances and new life. On this All Saints Day, this is our hope, this is our promise, this is our great joy. My fellow saints: you are God's people and God has conquered death, your death, in the power of resurrection. No matter the losses life hands you - embrace your new life this day and every day. Thanks be to God. Amen.