

## **“He Will Wipe Every Tear”**

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November 5, 2023

*<sup>9</sup>After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. <sup>10</sup>They cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!” <sup>11</sup>And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, <sup>12</sup>singing, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”*

*<sup>13</sup>Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?” <sup>14</sup>I said to him, “Sir, you are the one that knows.” Then he said to me, “These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. <sup>15</sup>For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. <sup>16</sup>They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; <sup>17</sup>for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (Revelation 7:9-17)*

There is a turn of phrase that I often use in a funeral, because I think it is a comforting thought. In one of the prayers, we recite the name of the departed person and proclaim that his or her baptism “is now complete in death.” It is a profound theological statement -- that our baptism is never really complete until our life concludes. We belong to God in life, but it is only when we enter into God’s presence and eternity that we fully understand what it means to be baptized into the body of Christ.

Paul explains this truth in his letter to the Romans. “Do you not know,” he wrote, “that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” He went so far as to say that “we have been buried with him by baptism into death.” So, baptism begins, in a way, with death. But Paul does not linger there. That death is merely a door to a new way, a new truth, a new life. “For if we have been united with [Christ] in a death like his,” Paul continues, “we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his . . . [for] if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.”<sup>1</sup>

On All Saints Sunday, we lay claim this mystical promise, both for us, and for those who have lived and served and loved God – some in this congregation, and others who were a part of our lives in other places. We know that none of them were perfect – that all of them were sinners just like we are sinners. But we still rightly call them saints, because we know that everything in them that was good is now full, and that anything else is now gone. All the flaws, all the failings, all of the regrets – they are buried in the deepest ocean, forgiven and forgotten by the heart of God. It is as if those imperfect things never existed at all, and all that remains is the very best of that person – all the things that we loved and cherished.

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 6:3-8.



Jan Richardson is a painter, a poet, and an ordained minister in the United Methodist Church. She treasures the time that we have just lived through this past week, the yearly turn from the last day of October to the first day of November... the pivot from Halloween to All Saints Day. "I learned long ago that it's important to pay attention to what happens in these days," she writes. "These days offer a doorway, a new threshold that changes everything."

Her perspective on these days is very personal. Her first date with her husband Gary was on Halloween. And then, ten years ago, All Saints Day took on new significance, when Gary died, much too young, much too early. When it comes around every year, she says she presses her ear to the door, to that threshold between life and death, and the deep love they shared abides.

Jan Richardson wrote a poem in the early days of her grief. She offers it as hope for everyone who has loved and lost, a talisman for us to hold onto as we remember our own beloved ones who have gone on to be with God. She calls the poem, "It is Hard Being Wedded to the Dead."

*It is hard being wedded to the dead;  
they make different claims, offer comforts that do not feel comfortable at the first.  
They do not let you remain numb.*

*Neither do they allow you to languish forever in your grief.  
They will safeguard your sorrow  
but will not permit that it should become your new country,  
your home.*

*They knew you first in joy, in delight,  
and though they will be patient when you travel by other roads,  
it is here that they will wait for you,  
here they can best be found  
where the river runs deep with gladness,  
the water over each stone singing your unforgotten name.<sup>2</sup>*

On this All-Saints Sunday, this is the faith we proclaim... that our grief will not last forever... that grief is neither our destiny nor our true home...

that no matter what roads we may travel, the saints who have gone before wait for us in our true home... a place of joy and delight... a place where the river runs deep with gladness... a place where there is no more hunger, no more thirst, no more death... and God waits for us there, ready to wipe away every tear from our eyes. *Amen.*

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<sup>2</sup> Jan Richardson, "It is Hard Being Wedded to the Dead," <https://paintedprayerbook.com/2014/10/24/it-is-hard-being-wedded-to-the-dead/#.VE0jR97vZUM>