

St. Thomas's Episcopal Church  
Newark, DE  
All Saints' Sunday – November 5, 2017/Year A  
The Reverend Elizabeth Masterson

Today, All Saints' Sunday, gives us an occasion to celebrate and reflect on the fellowship of the mystical body of Jesus Christ. That fellowship contains generations of Christ's followers who have joined the heavenly throng that John of Patmos calls "a great multitude that no one could count." But the mystical body of Jesus Christ also includes all of us, still alive, who follow Christ today. The pilgrimage windows here dramatically highlight some exemplars of the "virtuous and godly living," about which our collect speaks.

Today in this place we hold in our hearts and minds how we have lived into the mystical body of Christ during the past nine years under the pastoral leadership of Fr. Paul. I wasn't here last Sunday, but I have been told about the joy expressed both in worship and in the ice cream social that followed the 10:30 service. Our task in the next two months, while am with you, is to continue to live into the joy which comes from answering God's call for us to be part of the fellowship of folks who follow Jesus Christ—then to move on full of hope to the next phase of your life together.

In John's first letter, we heard a sentence that beautifully sums up where we are. John wrote, "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will become has not yet been revealed." There's a theological short-hand phrase for expressing this thought.

That phrase is “already, not yet.” The Reign of God—which will celebrate in a few weeks on the last Sunday of the Pentecost season—has already begun. We can see it in God’s incarnation—Jesus Christ—taking on human form and living as a human being. Living as one of us, Jesus taught us and showed us how God yearns for us to live. We can see it in the lives of the people depicted in the Pilgrimage windows—people who knew Jesus personally and were transformed through that relationship—as well as people who came to know Jesus through the faith God placed in their hearts and whose lives were transformed as a result.

You can see the reign of God in the 175 years of this parish’s life. As with the lives of the “saints” in the Pilgrimage Windows, we don’t look back and find perfect people who followed Jesus in this community. Who we do remember—or read about in the history of this parish—are folks who found that they had been “knit together” by God to love and worship God in this place. God had also brought them together here to love and serve others in God’s name.

Their efforts to respond to God’s yearning for a faithful parish that lives out the self-giving love Jesus showed us were imperfect. Our efforts to do this are imperfect as well. This is the “not yet” part of the “already, not yet” description of God’s reign in our world.

The “not yet” part of God’s reign was what Jesus was teaching his disciples with his words we call the “Beatitudes.” So what will characterize God’s reign that we

cannot by our own efforts and because of our own sinfulness achieve? The version from Matthew gospel shows a more spiritual bent than the version in Luke's gospel. Nevertheless in both we can see that the world's values and practices will be overturned. What the world sees as weak and impractical will be honored and blessed. All will have what they need. Mercy will trump retribution. Peace will be practiced. The sinfulness and impurity that separates us from God's love will fade from our hearts.

So what can we say, "Why can't your reign come now, O God, why not now?" This question has no answer. If you read about the lives of the people in our Pilgrimage Windows, you can imagine a time in each of their lives when they might well have thought or uttered these words. Every Sunday—and at many other times—we and other followers of Jesus pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Do we ever add the word, "now," in our minds?

As I think about the deaths and injuries this week in Manhattan caused by the person who drove a truck along a bike path crowded with innocent people—when I remember other deadly attacks on innocents too numerous to mention all of them by name—I want to say—to shout—to scream, "Thy kingdom come NOW, God!"

Yet now, "for the time being," as W. H. Auden calls it, we have "bills to be paid, machines to keep in repair/Irregular verbs to learn, the Time Being to redeem/From insignificance." (from Auden's *Christmas Oratorio*) Christ, indeed, has left humanity with work to do. Through our words and our deeds, our lives can be a force for the

redemptive work begun by Jesus. Here and now let us re-dedicate ourselves to love and to serve in Christ's name—until the Lamb “will guide [us] to springs of the water of Life, and God will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes.” Amen.