

This Is Our God
All Saints
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Today I want to look with you at a couple of snapshots, let's call them, from scripture – I use that idea of a snapshot because I'm thinking of the way that a photo, a picture can be a wide, panoramic scene, or sometimes it can be a close-up – and each view has its own kind of impact. And that's what you can see with the scripture lessons today – they're a combination of a broad view, literally seeing the big picture, and of a close-up - each one saying something about who God is. So I want to go back and forth between the big picture and the close-up in a few different ways.

The big picture, the panoramic view, comes from both the Isaiah and Revelation passages, and really Psalm 24 too. Isaiah and Revelation are remarkably similar in their images and tone – they picture God bringing all things, all people, all creation, into a final restoration of life and wholeness – grand images throughout both – in Isaiah: 'a feast for all peoples (with an emphasis on really good wine!)...the shroud over all people destroyed...death swallowed up forever...tears wiped from all faces...this is our God, the LORD of all the earth' – in Revelation: 'a new heaven and a new earth...the home of God with mortals...every tear wiped away and death no more, pain no more...I make all things new, I am the beginning and the end.' There are moments in scripture that reveal the big picture: from the beginning of creation through the people of Israel through the vision of the Old Testament prophets through the incarnation of Christ to the life of the church to the consummation of time, there are moments to step back and proclaim the broad scope of who God is and what God is about: the God of time and eternity; the God who brings life over death; the God of all people and all the earth – this is our God.

And then there are close-up moments too – the story from the Gospel about the raising of Lazarus. Here is a particular person, part of family – Jesus' close friends; here is a particular life, an illness, a death – here is a particular sadness, grief, loss – Jesus weeps. Here is a particular wonder, a life restored, risen from the dead – a miracle not for eternity, but for this life – a particular moment proclaiming life over death. Here is Jesus Christ, witnessed to as the LORD of eternity entered into a particular life and time, who deals with a particular person. Jesus cares, cries, reveals, heals, proclaims in this particular moment, a word of life over death – this is our God. And the thing is, the big picture and the close-up go together – they are the same image – together, this is our God.

Those pictures, broad and particular, panoramic and close-up, frame our faith, and frame what we are about today on an All Saints Sunday – and let me express that this time with the close-up first. At this one specific, little place, Hope Church, we have a list of names today – people in our particular community of faith who have died in our near past – and we will speak those names in our prayers. Each one, each person is important – each one a life loved and celebrated and grieved, each one a story, each a child of God known by their Savior, and each a life entrusted to God for the eternal victory of life – together a snapshot of Hope Church. But these names are not the whole picture – there are many other known in our hearts, whose deaths have touched our lives, family, friends, colleagues – a bigger picture; and much more too – our little, important list, does not scratch the surface of the reality of death in this world – of lives completed and lost each day in so many ways, tenderly and tragically. But here this snapshot in

our worship is our witness to the big picture: we witness, proclaim, that just as we entrust these people named to the God of life, so also we entrust this world and all peoples to the promise that the God of life holds this world and its peoples and will not let it go – our particular witness to the grand vision of Isaiah and Revelation.

... Which gives us a powerful image of how we are called to celebrate at this table on All Saints Sunday. Here there is enough for us - just a morsel of bread and gulp of juice that we say sustains us in faith, nourished in God's gracious promises for life. Yet we proclaim that what happens here is an image of something much bigger and broader – this is the feast of life that joins us with the Church/CapitalC; this is the gathering of the communion of the saints, all who have come before and all now and all to come; this is the table where all are welcome; this is the place where the bread and the cup witness to a God whose grace is sufficient for all – enough for all as God's intention and possibility and promise for this world.

Since this is our God – God of all time, and this time; God of life and of our lives... since this our keeping of All Saints and Communion – particular to us and witness to the world beyond us – we are left with an image of who we are and what we are about: our lives, one snapshot of time, are part of the big picture. Your life matters – the God of all time and eternity is present in your life; the Savior of the world calls you to follow as friend, and unbinds you from death to life; so in the great communion of the saints, you are one too – and our lives are called in small, significant ways to be an expression of life over death, of a source of God's grace, of one who offers sustenance for those in need in body and spirit.

The grand vision of who God is, the One making all things new, includes your life and mine – and in the grace of Jesus Christ our lives are a small part of bringing that grand vision to be. Thanks be to God this day for those saints who have gone before to show us that truth, and may we be nourished in our lives as witness to the God of life for this world now and to eternity. AMEN.