

All Saints Year B 2024

Unreal City,

Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.

These words were written by T.S. Eliot in the early 20th Century. They are contained in his epic poem, *The Wasteland*, verses that lament the disoriented state of the modern world. The poet quotes from Dante's *Inferno* whose protagonist has been wandering in a dark forest only to find himself at the gate of hell. The way up is the way down. And thus begins his journey to redemption. Upon seeing the multitudes there imprisoned he says, "I had not thought death had undone so many." Eliot saw the modern world as a hellish landscape, one that had been sapped of its vigor. He described the life of Modernity as, "Death in Life," a world faint of heart, living in fear, a deathly existence amid broken dreams, broken promises, broken community. For the poet, it is a passionless and anxious world suffering from crippling indifference. Absent of love, absent of hate, only indifference. In our world today, some 100 years after the writing of this poem, things remain much the same. In the first world West, our world, and arguably, the world at large, capitalism, the pursuit of wealth and power, has become the god of our time. Sadly, this god only attends to an elite few. In a world of abundant resources, almost thirty percent of the world's

population live in poverty whose only god is survival. I had not thought death had undone so many.

Our Gospel reading from John appointed for All Saints Sunday is the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. The writer is at his metaphorical height here. That is to say that this is not a magic act on the part of Jesus to be read literally. The aim of this author is not historical, but theological. This is a picture of what ministry looks like. The writer of this Gospel calls it “befriending,” Jesus the model... and like Jesus we are to go into the world as friends, and raise the dead... to “unbind them” in the words of Jesus.

Many a preacher has interpreted this passage as a teaching on life after death, a testimony to the promise of Resurrection. But, brothers and sisters, Resurrection Life, at least according to New Testament Scripture, is not about the hereafter... it is a promise of new life in the here and now; that the dead of our world can indeed live. We just have to unbind them. That is the work of salvation... Our work.

What bondage? You may ask. What death in life infects our world? In short, it is the abuse of power. Most of the preventable woes of our world come from the abuse of power, the disproportionate sharing of the world’s resources. Powers and principalities; empire. So I say again, salvation for the Gospel writers is not about going to heaven in the next life. Salvation is about living in well-being and dignity here and now. Heaven on earth, the scribes put it... God’s very promise to the people God

loves, is that all shall live as equals, with dignity, sharing the bounty of this earth.

Salvation is not merely spiritual... it is economic, social, and political.

Who are the victims of this Death in Life? Who are the ones bound by the grave clothes of injustice? All of us... When one is bound, all of us are bound... but in particular: Ninety percent of the world's wealth is held by five percent of the population. There is the immigrant who languishes at our southern border seeking to escape violence and poverty; the black kid living in a forgotten neighborhood in fear of the police; the one working two jobs, and still short of a living wage; the 30% of us who live in poverty despite living in the wealthiest nation in the world; the 40 plus thousand dead, and many more maimed in Gaza, victims of the arrogance and greed, and the political whims of empire... power gone wrong. These are the unsaved, because of the world's mere indifference. In this nation we have an election, possibly the most important in our lifetimes; and we have the opportunity to lend our voices for truth and love.... A collective voice to counter the voices of greed, and hate, and self-interest; wrong voices that have been our undoing throughout history.

What happened to us along the way? The world is not as it should be. We are here to make good on God's promises; that being to restore the beloved community. We are the bearers of God's Love; and it is Love that will set the world right.... Unbind them, good people... For the Love of God, do whatever you can to unbind them.