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Larkspur, California
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Isaiah 25:6-9, Revelation 21:1-6a, John 11:32-44
For All the Saints

The editor of the Presbyterian Outlook, Jill Duffield, sent me an All Saints' Day email last Monday commenting on departed saints via the lectionary passages just read. I massaged her letter into a sermon.

She writes, The BBC reporter in his detached newscaster voice shared the dying 6-year-old Yemeni boy's plea to the doctors working on him, his small body badly injured by a missile that struck his house. The boy, in tears, said, "Don't bury me." A reporter shared the footage of Fareed's last words on his Facebook page and after the little boy died, it went viral.

The story on the BBC website is titled, 'A dying boy's plea that became an iconic message for peace.'

"I am embarrassed," writes Duffield, "to admit that I had to Google 'conflict in Yemen' to be reminded of who was fighting whom and why. Syria had been on my mind and in my prayers, not Yemen.

"When I hear of a little boy begging the adults not to bury him I feel accountable. I feel compelled to remember Fareed on this All Saints' Day.

"This November 1, as I remember my beloved father-in-law who died way too soon and my grandparents and church members I have buried and miss, I also feel a need to remember those in the communion of the saints I don't know but dare not forget.

"The biblical texts for this week in Isaiah and in Revelation are about community on the grandest scale. They are about God's long awaited redemption of whole communities of people, of the entire creation, a new heaven and a new earth.

"Listen to the scope of the redemption in Isaiah: 'On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines ... and he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever.'

"Hear the intimacy of this relationship in Revelation: 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his people, and God himself

will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”

There is a powerful expansiveness and a tender closeness in these texts that call on us to lift up God's magnanimity and immediacy for us and for all people.

On this All Saints' Day, God has not forgotten Fareed. Nor has God neglected the ones you have loved and miss. God has not forgotten saints who served sacrificially like “Doctors without Borders” who provide medical care to 70 countries in the world, including high conflict areas like Yemen. God remembers all saints. We remember them all.

“Don't bury them”. Duffield writes, “Do not imagine that death has the last word, either. Too often resurrection is left to Easter Sunday. It is as if we can only suspend our disbelief in the finality of death for a few hours, once a year. We sing alleluia and then live as if Jesus never left the tomb, relegating the tragedies of our time to the category of inevitable, insurmountable and beyond hope. We ignore the pleas of Fareed.

“We allow the rhythms of the news cycle to focus and frame our attention even as vast numbers of people continue to suffer long after the cameras are turned off.

“We recite the correct faith statement, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day ... I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.” But, too often, we fail to act on that belief, ignoring Jesus' command to move the stone. We neglect to unbind the ones Jesus has called forth from the grave.”

All Saints' Day is a day to preach resurrection, to have the audacity to proclaim that death, destruction, violence, and pain are not the final word.

“All three of these texts for All Saints' Day are about God's ability and certain promise to bring about long awaited and seemingly impossible reconciliation, redemption and life.”

Duffield continues, “The question we have to ask ourselves and those gathered is, ‘Do we believe this?’

“God hears and heeds the pleas of all of his children crying, “Don't bury me.” God's home is among mortals. God destroys the shrouds that have been cast over all people. God wipes away the tears of Fareed and all faces. God is creating a new heaven and a new earth. Death, mourning, and crying will be no more. Do we believe this?

Let us remember all the saints today, let us hear the cries of the vulnerable, look at the haunting photos, grieve for the suffering in the world and the sadness in the room, but do not grieve as those without hope, instead grieve as those who expect to see the glory of God.

“We are followers of the God of resurrection, the ones who go down to the grave singing alleluia, alleluia, alleluia; trusting in the truth that through Christ death is defeated.

“We can get to work, rolling away grave stones and unbinding those Jesus has brought back to life, no matter how many there are, no matter how many days have past.”

God bless our dearly departed and God bless us as we continue to proclaim and work for God's peace, justice and life now and forevermore. Amen.