

All Saints Day, Year C
Luke 6: 20-31

Trinity Episcopal Church
Sonoma, California

A Listening Ear:
A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Susan Allison-Hatch

Today we celebrate the great feast of All Saints—a day that calls us together in communion with those who, as our prayer book puts it, “we love and see no longer” and those whom we do not know but who nonetheless share a common heritage with us, a day when we read the roll of the dead and celebrate their role in our lives. All Saints Day is a day when we come together as stranger and friend, living and dead, ordinary and heroic in one great communion of saints. It’s a day when we celebrate connectedness—with one another, with those who have gone before us, and with those who will come after us. It’s a day when boundaries are blurred—a day when the living and the dead join together in one great communion of Saints.

Dia de los Muertos is a day like that—a day when the line between the living and the dead seems to blur, a day when the spirits of the dead return to the land of the living. People have told me that Dia de los Muertos is a time when the two communities of Sonoma—Hispanic and Anglo—come together, a time when the Hispanic community offers Anglos a window into their family values, their rich heritage and their sense of connectedness both with their ancestors and with the land of their forbearers.

In this week when we as a community are still reeling from the tragic death of one of our youth, in this week when we are struggling to understand how a young Latino got to a place where he was shot and killed by another young Latino, in this week when we are trying to figure out what we can do to prevent more violence, we are presented with the gift of Dia de los Muertos, with the gift of All Saints, with the gift of the reminder that we are connected with one another—living and dead, stranger and friend, Anglo and Latino.

But Dia de los Muertos, and All Saints as well, also present us with a challenge—the challenge of listening to one another across boundaries of culture, time and even mortality. How do we listen to our companions in the communion of Saints? How do we come to understand one another?

Compassionate understanding of the other grows out of a special kind of listening—not the multi-tasking kind of listening we do so often in our lives, not the shallow listening that assumes we already know what

is going on, but a deeper, intentional and non-judgmental kind of listening. The kind of listening Jesus does.

We are challenged to listen for one another's pain and joy and fear and hope as they emerge in the stories we tell.

We are challenged to listen not only to what is said but also to what is left unsaid.

We are challenged to listen with our ears and also our eyes.

We are challenged to listen in order to understand someone else's world and thought.

We are challenged to listen not only in the moment but also by digging deep into the world of the other—working to understand their history, their symbols, their heroes and heroines, the rhythm of their days.

To listen in such a way is risky. We have to let go of the notion that we know what is going on in someone else's world. We have to let go of control of the conversation. We have to expose our ignorance. We have to be ready to hear hard truths.

I can imagine that some of the people listening to Jesus found themselves challenged to listen in a different way, challenged to listen to others in the crowd, challenged to hear hard truths.

I've often wondered where Jesus was going when he said, "Woe to you who are rich, woe to you who are full now, woe to you who are laughing now, woe to you when all speak well of you...." What do you suppose he was trying to do? His was not a vision that excluded.

I wonder, could it be that Jesus was trying to get them—the satisfied ones

—to hear the cries of the hungry, the poor, and those who weep
—to listen, to really listen to their stories

Hear what Jesus says, "But I say to you that listen....Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

I think Jesus wants us to listen to one another, to hear one another's stories, to respond to one another's hunger and pain, to extend the hand of friendship to one another.

On this day, this great feast of All Saints, we are called, you and I to listen well as we reach across the gulfs that divide living and dead, stranger and friend, rich and poor, Anglo and Latino, old-timer and new-comer.

As the poet May Sarton once asked,
Can we not start at the small roots again,
Build this "we" slowly, gently, one by one,
From each small center toward communion?
Reach over the frontier, stranger to stranger,
To find the only sure relief from danger?
Take the immense dangerous leap to understand,
Build an invisible bridge from mind to mind?

And when we build that bridge, when we reach across the gulfs that divide, when we listen well, we join in full participation in the Communion of Saints—living and dead.