

Nov. 2, 2025

Pr. Steve

Texts: Isaiah 25: 6-8; Psalm 103: 1-8; Revelation 21: 1-6; Luke 6: 20-21

In the name of God, Abba/Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Many years ago, Bev and I worked at the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota—the whole summer of 1973. And it was a great opportunity for conversations with many Lakota people who occasionally spoke about—that even from the *'Days of Terror'* back in the late 1800s through the current day—white people are kind of strange. And whenever they [white people] came to the Rez, they'd ask, *'Where's the Chief? Can we meet the Chief? We'd like to see the Chief. Can we cut a deal with the Chief?'*

And in tribal life, the Chief really wasn't that important. Well, as for power, who's got the power? *'Among the indigenous,'* the Lakota people said, *'It's the shaman. That's the foundation person. It's the shaman, he or she, who gives us a vision to live by. It's the shaman who remembers the past, and our ancestors, and how we can look. It's the shaman who brings healing to the people. It's the shaman who lets us know our lives are real and valuable.'*

They also said, *'It is quite true that we as Lakota people only listen to the shamans about fifty percent of the time because, you know, those people are crazy. They're off, you know. We can't do all the things they're talking about.'*

So, I carry no delusions. While I have been deeply loved by all of you, I know you've only listened to me half the time. I know it. It's okay. It's okay. I've gotten used to it.

All Saints is the day for last things, last times, last occasions—the last time you saw loved ones who have passed on, the last smile, the last hug, the last dance, the last conversation, the last meal, the last supper.

And yet the river of life flows on.

I'm thinking about a few of the rivers I've seen my lifetime. I got to see the Shyok and Zaskar Rivers, the highest rivers in the world in the Himalayas, flowing down 13,000 feet all the way to move to the sea in Tibet. I've gotten to travel on it. And swim in the Amazon with indigenous friends.

I got to swim in the Dead Sea. (Some of you been there.) You put this black clay all over your body because it's good for your skin. And then you go into the Dead Sea, and you start laughing and laughing because all you can do is float. And washing that clay into your being —it's just, it's fun.

I spent two days in Varanasi, India, the sacred city for Hindus which is the ideal place to die and be cremated. They have three funeral pyres burning day and night, 24/7, year-round. This has been going on for centuries—the ideal place to come and die and be cremated. And the last thing that happens before one is placed on the funeral pyres is the body is wrapped in gauze, and loved ones come to carry the corpse into the waters of Mother Ganga, the Ganges, up to the legs. And then family members cup their hands with a bit of water from the Ganges, and they pour it into the mouth of the deceased—because the last desire of every human being is, '*I thirst. I thirst.*'

Jesus said it himself, didn't he? Almost the last thing he said, '*I thirst.*'

Though I've accumulated a few years on the planet, my thirst has increased.

I thirst that we continue to create from the joy that has become ours. I feel thirst that we ground ourselves in contemplative practice, because all the stuff we've got going on, all the business, all the information—AI is not going

to change and heal us. We need to be grounded in that Spirit—that ancient depths of Who We Are—to come to that wisdom which is both intimate and infinite.

I thirst for courage and backbone in people everywhere, in the church, in leaders, because we dare not habituate ourselves to Death, which is what's going on right now. Day after day it gets worse, doesn't it? *'Oh well. Times are rough.'* We walk away.

I thirst that the truth of the Beatitudes, this incredibly paradoxical wisdom, might break its way into our hearts. Just that opening line from Jesus — *'Blessed are the poor.'* Who else in history has ever said such a thing? Who and why?

Blessed are those who are being disappeared and deported and departed. Blessed are you—and you're empty, and you feel you're at the end of the rope and there's nothing else to do. And you're lost in confusion and despair. *Blessed are you.* Right there is where God's going to meet you—in that emptiness, in that hollowness, in that darkness. God is there. *Blessed are the poor.* God will be intimate with you.

I'm deeply grateful today for these clergy [Pr. Lucy, Pr. Ruth and Pr. Margareta.] I really am. Not just because they've been friends for a lifetime, but because these people have paid the price. They've paid the price. They know what it costs if you're going to practice unconditional love. They know what it is to come up against Church institutions and structures that just want you to play the game. *'Be nice. Come on. Be kind your animals—that's enough.'*

It's true— I can't take it anymore. These people have paid the price—to know what it is to get into the streets, and to be confrontational so there might be Justice. They know what it is to provide pastoral care to people who have no hope, when you are hovering over the abyss and don't know where to turn, how to be with people in the dark until the light emerges, again. They know. They've paid the price. These are clergy you need to pay attention to.

I have a friend named Bruce Silverman. He's the founder of the Sons and Daughters of Orpheus, a drumming group. We've done work together for

decades all over the Bay Area. And Bruce, sometimes alone, sometimes with a friend, has played here for Sunday morning worship and Eucharist. (Incredible what drumming does to us!)

And the last occasion for which he was here for Worship, he communed. (Bruce is Jewish.) And he came out to Hospitality [in the Gathering Hall], and I was talking with a small group of people. Bruce said, *'You may have noticed that I communed today.'* I said, *'Yes, I did.'* He said, *'The spirit was so thick that I could not not commune. Of course, my Jewish grandmother is turning over in her grave, because she said, 'The one thing you never do is eat that Christian meal.'*

You see this is about transcending all the boundaries. The Gospel is so wide open, so expansive—we've shrunk it, you know. *'It's just a particular practice, a competing ideology with other religions. We're better than Hinduism. I can tell you.'* Nonsense! We're fulfilling humanity in God's dream, through all the practices. Wherever we are compassionate and merciful, there is Hope. There is Life.

It's happened so many times here. Bahá'í, Buddhist, Muslim, Sikh, Sufi friends have communed. We have attained profound moments with the Pacific Choir, transcending life itself with Jazz, with friends from Lwamondo Parish [SA], Laurel Galan, Nicaragua, the Swedish choir from Kista, Sweden singing at New Folsom Prison.

That's how we got connected with Spoon Jackson. He wrote the poetry in Words of Realness which the Swedish Choir performed, and I can tell you, because we were there inside of new Folsom Prison when they [Swedish Choir] sang, everybody was free. Everybody. And the next day, when they sang at San Quentin, they were set free, too.

That's what we're about, and I'm not trying to encourage just highlights now and then. Friends, what I'm saying is it's always here. The Spirit is always here, nurturing, stirring the possibilities, and that Divine connection upon which all life depends. You will never be abandoned—never.

Hafiz was a great mystic—lived eight hundred years ago, around the time of Francis and Clare and Dogon, and so many other greats on the planet. In the Sufi tradition, they call him, the God intoxicated. (Isn't that a great name?) And Hafiz said there's only one sin. He said, *'There's only one sin, and that is if you have ever been in the midst of despair, and brokenness, and hopelessness, and I have failed to speak to you of the Beloved, if I fail to nurture in you that compassion which knows no end, if I have failed to remind you that you've been loved since before you were born, that's a sin.'*

I'm far from perfect, I know that. I have failed many of you. That's hardly the point. But forgive me, if I have sinned by ever forgetting to remind you the Beloved loves you.

Someday, Death will claim its last person, and the crucified Compassion and resurrecting Love will come to the culmination of its fullness where God will be all in all. And all shall be loved for Who We Are. And it will be irresistible—because God can only be known by Loving.

Choir, will you repeat that after me, *'God can only be known by loving.'*
Don't believe anybody else. God can only be known by loving.
Live into it. Be freed by it. Dance to it.

We know we're blessed, don't we? In the midst of everything that tears people down, and wants to destroy this world, we know we're blessed. We just have to keep reminding each other of it. That's the core. You are blessed. Did you forget? You are blessed. Always remember, you are blessed. You are blessed. You're blessed.

Not fair to the people around them and tell them and they have to say it back to you right now. Look into their eyes. Tell me. You are blessed. Come on, people need to know this. You are blessed, tell them, *'You are blessed.'* Wow. We are blessed.

And it will never stop. It will never stop. We have to keep reminding each other. Long before we were born, God's beauty danced us into being. God

has loved us into being. And worship and praise or simply the chance to say, 'Thank you'.

That's why we come to church—[it's] not for attendance, okay. (I'm still giving out gold stars today after worship, but it's not...) Why we're here is to know we're blessed, to come alive, to be touched by that beauty which knows no end. As Rumi said, '*Let the beauty we love be what we do.*' Let the beauty we love be what we do. Can you repeat that? Let the beauty we love be what we do. Let the beauty we love be what we do. Let the beauty we love be what we do. Let the beauty we love, be what we do.

Amen.

The peace, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.