

Denice K. Leslie
November 5, 2006
Isaiah 25: 6-9
Revelation 21: 1 – 6 a
John 11:32 – 44
ALL SAINTS DAY

“No More Broken”

(Uncover and lift loaf and begin to break off pieces as you speak and drop them on the floor...)

Before his death he takes a loaf and he says, “This is my body, broken for you....This is my body broken...”

Jesus death on the cross broke his body.

(Ask the congregation):
Tell me about how the world is broken.
How is Christ crucified every day?
Hmm? Something in the news that struck you hard? Something on your mind? Stuck in your throat—digging into your heart?

The fight involving two Awahnee middle students that resulted in the death of one of the two...and the consequent arrest of the other.

The body of Christ, broken. (Say it with me—
RAISE YOUR ARM AS A SIGNAL: ***The body of Christ broken.***

(Allow for congregation’s contributions and drop a piece of bread as each is offered or as you name the brokenness):

The rape of an Iraqi teen and the execution of her family by U.S. soldiers.

The body of Christ broken.

The discovery of more human remains in a man hole at ground zero.

The body of Christ broken.

A newspaper blurb about the sentencing of a father for starving his child to death.

The body of Christ broken.

The apathy of the world as the genocide in Darfur continues unabated.

The body of Christ broken.

The 150 deaths of young soldiers in Iraq in October.

The body of Christ broken.

The 11 million children orphaned as the result of HIV in Africa.

The body of Christ broken.

The homeless mentally ill sleeping in our church alcoves.

The body of Christ broken.

(Crumble the remaining bread in your hands and drop on the floor and rub your hands to brush away any remaining bread as you say):

The body of Christ, broken, crushed, crumbled, dispersed. Given away—all away for the brokenness of the world.

Lying here on the floor. Jesus body in the dirt, under our feet. Not on a nice tiled floor like this one—but in the grit, dust and dirt of a very public execution on two crossed wooden poles.

Put there by the power of this world that chooses to rule with brokenness. An innocent sacrifice for the brokenness of the world. A victim? No.

A willing victim is not victimized He is a victor. He is made victorious by the very power that sought to slay him. By his death, he overpowers death. By his submission he conquers.

Jesus shows us in his death, and instructs us in the breaking of the bread that we are his body. When we eat his body we become his body.

We are gathered here as one.

We come to the table and we eat, and when we leave this place we break up and scatter into the world to offer ourselves as a holy and living sacrifice in union with Christ’s offering for us.

We join him in his sacrifice and victory by offering our own lives as he did, to overcome the brokenness of the world.

They thought they'd killed him. But in his brokenness he was simply multiplied. God's love multiplied through those of us who love him. For those of us who have discovered the amazing truth—that Jesus was broken for the world—for me. For my brokenness, our brokenness. Who understand that in spite of my brokenness I am accepted! I am being made whole by the love of God.

And so it is that we are a piece of him. And through his love are now joined to him.

Like sticky buns! Have you seen those sticky bun coffee cakes? A whole lot of sticky buns, stuck together by drizzled cinnamon sugar syrup. Joined together! Yes—into one body—re-constituted. No longer just one, but many. We who are many are one body in Christ Jesus!

But that's not all. We are given new life by his rising from the dead. I receive him into my life. I am forgiven and I am given a new lease on life! RESURRECTION. It's about resurrection. New life.

Like Lazarus. Jesus raised him up. Yes, he died of natural causes—but the fact is there isn't anything really natural about death. No, it came into the world with sin. It is a result of brokenness. Our brokenness.

The rule of sin causes us to buy into the falsehood that the only way to have order, security and good in the world is to rule with death. Death dealing ways.

Jesus defies death. Jesus shows death up. Jesus calls us to do the same. Jesus raising of Lazarus makes it clear: it isn't necessary to buy into the power of death because it's a false power.

The only REAL power in this world is GOD. Even when, not if, death kills you—you aren't subject to death. Because Jesus beat death with love—God isn't about death. God doesn't deal in death. God is about life.

God is about you being the best you can be. God is about you going out there and being the best you can be for others.

God is about sticking you into the body of Christ so you can go out there and stick others together and make them whole by helping them see their brokenness through YOUR brokenness and how HIS brokenness has made you WHOLE. You have a brokenness story. Some place in your life you were hurt, less than whole, or naïve, or arrogant or believed in your own self-sufficiency, or were a captive of some addiction that gradually began to strangle your life—like alcohol-- until you stumbled over a piece of Jesus body and that made you sit up and take notice.

Maybe you were offended, or curious, or shamed, or awakened or loved for the first time. But someplace along the way you met Jesus and you had to deal. You had to make up your mind. And then live your life accordingly.

That's what saints do you know. Saints are people who were broken until they met Jesus. Jesus' getting broken—when he wasn't broken in the first place; his generosity of self-giving, his outpouring, his courage, his wholeness in the process of being crumbled took hold of them. And it changed their lives. Saints are people whose lives have been changed by meeting and following Jesus.

And real saints know it's not just about feeling good. It's not about rose and pink tinged clouds removed from the grit and dirt under the cross. It's not about a spiritual high that removes us from the world.

Enjoying spiritual feelings without spiritual ideas, of course, is what tacks the foam rubber onto the cross.

Spirituality, under the modern template, does not brace one for suffering that leads to inner growth. Instead, it obliterates suffering by providing the musical equivalent of an injection from Dr. Feelgood.

Pop psychology survives by ignoring or distracting us from the staples of any profound spirituality: a sense of sin, an acceptance of the tragic, and love conquering suffering, and death, to lead us to resurrection, or life, as Saint John wrote, to the full.¹ □

But that is what communion, and our communion with the saints gone before us and as the saints in the world today is all about.

C. S. Lewis tells the story of an old saint who, when asked whether it is easy or hard to love God, replied: It is easy to those who do it².

Each of us must follow Jesus for ourselves. You may never have to face the decision of whether or not to die for your faith, but every day you face the decision of whether or not you will live for it.³ □

John Buchanan of Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago uses a metaphor for the communion of saints that he believes ought to be told at least once a year.

The metaphor originated with Southern Baptist preacher Carlyle Marney, who used the image of balcony. □ □

¹ --Eugene Kennedy, quoted by Martin Marty in Context, January 1, 1999, 2.

² Arthurian Torso (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), 142.

³ —A quotation from the book Jesus Freaks: Stories of Those Who Stood For Jesus, presented on the Web site Soul Food: A Taste of the Wisdom of the Saints, □ Xtremespirit.org/soul.html. Retrieved December 12, 2003. □

Marney used to say that your personhood, your personality, persona, is like a house, and it's a fairly elaborate and complex structure. Some are fancy. Some are sophisticated. Some are simple and functional. Some are ostentatious. Some are modest. Each has a number of rooms: a formal parlor for greeting guests, a family room, bedroom, kitchen.

Marney said each of us has in the structure of our persona a basement where the plumbing is [located] and the trash is stored. NO need to spend your life down there,

Marney used to say. Everybody has a basement. Come on up into the sunshine. Sometimes we act as if the plumbing and trash bin are all there is to us, Marney observed. □

And if you come upstairs and step outside onto the lawn and look up, you will see that the house that is you has a spacious, gracious balcony. There are people up there on your balcony. □ □

Marney was a Southerner, so his balcony was white wrought iron with wicker rocking chairs. There are people in the rocking chairs on your balcony sipping iced tea or bourbon, depending on whether you are a Baptist or Presbyterian, Marney used to say.

The people on your balcony are the strong, positive influences in your life. Your heroes and heroines. Your models and mentors. Your parents are probably up there ... your grandparents.

There are some folk up there you never met but they influenced and helped shape you and there are some really big names up there: people whose lives inspired you from afar and called deeper faith out of you and courage and stamina and love and discipline. □

The people on your balcony are your saints. The way to observe All Saints' Day is to walk out onto your lawn, look up and greet them. Call the roll. Name them. Wave to them. Your saints -- your

dear ones -- the great ones and small ones: your mother and father maybe, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, your old coach, your piano teacher.⁴

Look at the insert in today's worship folder. See the list of names. These are saints. These are balcony people. Folks whose memory is dear for the contribution they made to the lives of those who remembered them today. The question is: will your name be on a sheet like this some future All Saints Day?

Will you be remembered as helping to heal the brokenness of life? Will you be added to the role of those who stood with Jesus, who helped stick people back together? Will you be in somebody's balcony because you chose to give yourself away?

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall. Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.

All the king's horses, and all the king's men, couldn't put Humpty together again.

But Jesus can. And Jesus will, through regular folks, once broken,) made whole, stuck to Jesus—saints just like you.

And one day (*pull out the second loaf like the first and hold it high*) in this old world, there will be **NO MORE BROKEN!!** Say it with me: **NO MORE BROKEN!!**

As the scripture promises us: no more tears, no more crying, no more pain anymore. Because he is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end!

Let the people say: **Alleluia! Amen!**

⁴ --John M. Buchanan, For All the Saints, Chicago, Ill., November 2, 1997.