



## “Removing Stones”

All Saints Sunday  
Saturday & Sunday, November 3–4, 2018  
All Services  
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Revelation 21:1-6a; John 11:32-44

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

What gets in your way? What is stopping you from doing what you enjoy? What are the stones that get in your way? Your stones might be literal things. They might be opportunity. It might be time, or money. Your stones might be something like transportation, or lack thereof. Or maybe your stones are education: you need more, or you need something specific. Perhaps those stones blocking your way might simply be *you*, holding *yourself* back, thinking you simply aren't *good enough* to even try.

For some people, unfortunately, they see their stones as being . . . people, other human beings. I say all this in light of the events of last week. Because there were a couple of people that saw other human beings as their stones, as holding them - or others like them - back. And so those poor excuse for a human being went on a tantrum. And now, people are dead.

People are dead, because we live in a broken world. People were butchered, because some misguided individuals decided that a certain sector of the American population, some “others,” did not fit their own definition of “human being.” People were murdered because that someone felt that those now dead - and not the shooter - were somehow responsible for all that was wrong in the shooter's life, as well as all that is wrong in this country, and with the world. Therefore, by the shooters thinking, it was absolutely fine to take a weapon - a weapon that was designed *specifically* to kill the largest predator of all: humans - to take that weapon and execute eleven unarmed, unaware people. And the shooter did so, apparently, primarily, because of their ethnic heritage. The stones in his way were apparently stones of a different faith.

Did you also hear about the two people executed at a Jeffersontown KY Kroger supermarket? After unsuccessfully attempting to enter a congregation filled with members whose skin was darker than his, this shooter went to a nearby Kroger, and shot and killed Maurice Stallard, 69, and Vickie Lee Jones, 67. Again, both of whom were unarmed, unaware, unsuspecting that grocery shopping - in Maurice's case, with his grandson - would put their lives at risk. Both of whom also happen to be of dark complexion. Why is that important? Because after executing them from the safety of several feet away, the shooter then said to a person who accosted him in the parking lot, who was of *light* complexion, “*Whites don't kill whites.*” His stones, apparently, were colored **dark**.

<sup>32</sup> *When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."*

What would Jesus do? What would Jesus do, indeed? What would Jesus do in the face of blatant hatred? What would Jesus do in the face of ethnic cleansing? In the face of race superiority, or holy war, or fundamentalism run amok, or liberalism gone off the rails?

<sup>39</sup> *Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days."*

We who do **not** act to stop the evil when it is perpetrated by those who seek to kill, maim, or harm, are like those who stood outside the tomb, making a show of their grief. They displayed grief but didn't really mourn.

*"Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"*

They didn't believe what Jesus is capable of. Those false mourners are like people who say vile, hate-filled things, and **then** are honestly astounded when others act on what they have been prodding them to do.

What is wrong with us? What is wrong with us, as individuals, what is wrong with us as a people, what is wrong with us as a country, that we allow these abominations to continue?

I understand wanting to be around those who are like us, who have similar interests and concerns. I get that. For the most part, that's okay. What is **Not** okay is when we surround ourselves with those like us, and *then* cast anyone who is **not** like us as "the other." When we classify people as "the other," it is all too easy for them to become the enemy; the non-human; the crux of all that is "wrong." And then the solution to fixing that "wrong" is to eliminate "the other."

<sup>40</sup> *Jesus said to (Martha), "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"*

When did we stop believing? When did we, as a people, when did we as individuals, stop believing that **we** are, **all of us**, the Body of Christ? Why do we forget that we are, **all humans**, created in the image of God, *regardless* of what ever faith we practice? Why have we allowed *differences* to become something that is hated, rather than, at the very *least*, something to be discussed, something to strive to understand "the other" point of view, to see the *positive* in someone with whom I do not agree? Why have we allowed ourselves to become so divided, so devoted to "my way or the highway"?

The beginning of chapter 11, we didn't have it in our reading today, but when Jesus gets word about Lazarus' impending death and decides he wants to return to Judea, his disciples say 'Lord, they just tried to *kill* you there, that's why we left. Why would you

want to go back?' To which Jesus responds:

<sup>9</sup> "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. <sup>10</sup> But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." (John 11:9-10 NRSV)

Why do we insist on walking in the darkness? That darkness of self-interest, the darkness of political party, or business ethics, or "fake news" or "The Other"?

We **ALL** have stones that block our way. Those stones that stop us from achieving the life Christ calls us to live. Those stones, and all kind of other stones, prevent us from helping those in need. They prevent us from sharing our gifts with those who could benefit. They keep us from simply being *human* to one another, regardless of ethnic heritage or sexual orientation or gender or economic class or political affiliation or whatever designation we can come up with to make those different from us into "the other."

We are called to live in the hope. And today, this *All Saints Day*, is a day that we remember the hope that God loves us. No matter how many good things we do, God loves us. No matter how many times we screw up, God loves us. We remember that God loves us *regardless* of how much money we've earned, or the gender of our partner, or the pigment of our skin, or whatever else we as humans come up with.

God loves us **regardless** of those things. God loves us **in spite** of those things. God loves the people we can't stand. God loves the people we are afraid of. God loves the people we reject, or turn away, or call names. God loves **us** . . . as much as God loves **them**.

God can remove the stones in our own lives to allow us to love "the other." God can remove the stones in our hearts that make us think there are "the other."

Stop shutting God out of your life. Allow God to remove that stone. Then pray for all those you love; pray for all those you hate; pray for all those to whom you are indifferent.

If we can let God move those stones in our lives, then maybe Pittsburgh, maybe Jeffersontown, might be the last time.

Amen.

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