

## **“Today Salvation has Come”**

by Tim Hall

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***Habakkuk 1:1-14; 2:1-4; Psalm 119:137-144; 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12; Luke 19:1-10***

For his Sunday morning sermons, Father Ralph often pulls a Washington Post from the pulpit to share with us some current event that should challenge our Christian faith. Things that go against the Kingdom of Heaven. Things like we read about in Habakkuk this morning where we feel that the “wicked surround the righteous” and “the law becomes slack and justice never prevails.”

Well I have a headline to share with you this morning... [show “Nationals are the Champs”.  
*[Extemporize... The parade to celebrate this reminds me of our reading from Luke... Zacchaeus].*

This morning we are celebrating All Saints Day. We’re singing songs about the saints of God and will be lighting candles to help us remember those loved ones that have gone on to join the heavenly chorus before us. I’d like to start with a little risotherapy; some jokes I know I’ve shared before, but worth revisiting as they are very apropos.

A priest told the little kids in his church that they could come Trick-or-Treating at the rectory, but they should dress up as one of the Saints. So the kids arrive - here's a little boy dressed up as St. Anthony, another as St. Joseph, a little girl is St. Clare - and then there's this kid in a dog costume. So Father asks "Where's your saint costume?" The little boy replies: "I'm SAINT BERNARD!"

The old time pastor was galloping down the road, rushing to get to church on time. Suddenly his horse stumbled and pitched him to the ground. In the dirt with a broken leg, the pastor called out, “All you saints in Heaven, help me get up on my horse!” Then, with superhuman effort, he leaped onto the horse’s back and fell off the other side. Once again on the ground, he called to Heaven, “All right saints, just half of you this time!”

Today, instead of using the lectionary prescribed for All Saints, I decided to go with the lessons appointed for the Sunday closest to November 2<sup>nd</sup>, or Proper 26, Year C as it’s known in church lingo, to see where they might lead us.

And as it turns out, today’s scripture lessons present a unified whole, in lovely, surprising connections.

The prophet Habakkuk is notable because he questions God. He asks, “O Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you will not listen?” and then he announces that he will wait for God’s answer. And indeed, God does answer him, saying, “There is still a vision for the appointed time...it will surely come...the righteous live by their faith.” The message in Habakkuk is clear: even though destruction and violence are all around, the time will surely come; wait for it; live by faith.

In the psalm appointed for the day, the psalmist tells us that he has been consumed by indignation because his enemies forget God's commandments, yet in spite of his distress, God's commandments are a delight.

Both the prophet and the psalmist are transformed from questioning and indignation to faith and delight in God's law, in the certainty that God's justice is everlasting and the time awaited – the time of salvation – will surely come.

Paul gives thanks for the people of the church in Thessalonica, because he sees their faith growing abundantly, and their love for one another increasing, even during a time of persecution and affliction. Clearly then, we see a theme of holding a steadfast and joyful faith while the world around us is violent and unjust.

And finally, we have our story of Zacchaeus from Luke. He was anxious to see Jesus but was in the back of the crowd. Just like our tax collector in last week's reading, who hung at the back of the temple while the Pharisee made his prideful prayers, Zacchaeus may not feel like being right out front. Perhaps he is ashamed of who he is, just as last week's tax collector prayed, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" And so he climbs a tree. And Jesus recognizes him. And, as if the story from last week is continuing, Zacchaeus repents and tells the Lord what his change of heart will mean. And Jesus declares his salvation.

On this All Saints Day celebration, we think about famous saints, like Peter and Paul, St. Francis, or perhaps you have your own favorite. One of mine is St. Thomas, the doubting one. And what we need to realize is that even the saints weren't perfect. They knew their own sins, like our tax collector, and ever asked for forgiveness and mercy.

When we look at the saints, we find that their lives are complicated. Hailed in her lifetime as a living saint, some were troubled to learn that Mother Teresa of Calcutta had told her spiritual director that she spent most of the years of her ministry in deep doubt, including about the existence of God. This was discovered through sixty-six years of correspondence between Mother Teresa and her spiritual confidants which came to light after her death. The publication of the correspondence was not intended to mar her international reputation; those seeking her sainthood wanted to present the nun as she really was, serious doubts and all.

In accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, Teresa proclaimed to the world that she accepted the award in the name of the poor: "And through this award and through all of us gathered here together, we are wanting to proclaim the good news to the poor that God loves them, that we love them, that they are somebody to us, that they too have been created by the same loving hand of God, to love and to be loved." This was very much like Jesus. Yet months earlier, she wrote a confidant, "Jesus has a very special love for you, as for me, the silence and emptiness is so great that I look and do not see, listen and do not hear." To accept Mother Teresa as a saint is to take her doubts and all as one who loved the poor as Jesus taught, even when she didn't feel God's presence.

Not only do we honor the famous saints on All Saints Day, but we use the day, as well, to honor and remember those “saintly” friends and family who have *personally* touched our lives and helped set us and keep us on our paths of Christian service and devotion. We remember them with love and joy and pray that they, and all the saints, may be a daily example for how we should live our lives.

So today, as we celebrate the Feast of All Saints and the Feast of All Souls, let us begin to live by a different set of standards. Instead of worldly standards, let us begin to live by the standards of the Kingdom of Heaven, which is even now and to be.

Our commitment starts anew today. It starts by taking joy in loving our enemies. It starts by taking joy in showing kindness to people who don’t deserve it, like Zacchaeus. It manifests itself in the ability to listen and show honor to those who are forced to beg. This joy is lived out, not in the comfort of our homes or our churches or our offices, but among the poor and the hungry and the sorrowful and the hated; because, after all, the Kingdom of God belongs to them.

We can do this! We have the life and teachings of Jesus to give us strength. As he said to Mary and Martha after raising Lazarus from the dead, and as he says to us, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” We are Christ’s hands and feet, his heart and love in this broken world.

Jesus tells us this morning to “Today salvation has come to this house. For the Son of Man came to seek out and save the lost.” This includes the unseen, the overlooked, the misunderstood folks on the edges of our community, the ones who need to climb a tree in order to be seen. It includes you and me. And it’s this generosity for which we must be eternally thankful and which we need to offer ourselves.

In closing, to paraphrase our reading of St. Paul’s 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the Thessalonians, let us pray.

“To this end we always pray, asking that our God will make us worthy of his call and will fulfill by his power every good resolve and work of faith, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in us, and we in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.!”

~ Amen