



## All Souls Evensong – November 1, 2009

### “Hope”

#### A homily preached by the Rev'd James J. Popham

Last night we began a three day sequence of observances that speak of death and those who have gone before us. Now the first, of course, is a secular observance: A Celtic pagan holiday of many centuries past observed the harvest and first day of winter, which apparently served as reminders of mortality. Large bonfires were built to ward off any of the dead that might consider the possibility of departing their graves to visit friends and relatives. That holiday now has been appropriated by the candy manufacturers, costume makers, and dentists of the civilized world and is well-known today as Halloween. And certainly many spent last evening warding off ghosts and goblins not with bonfires, but with sweet treats of various types. But as this day comes to a close, we draw our focus to souls of the faithful departed. Not those “big name” saints who get a day on the church calendar – we did that this morning - but those who have truly gone before us. Our friends, our families. And, perhaps, too, like the Celts of old, we get a glimpse of our own mortality.

But more significantly, we are reminded how as the living faithful, we are to approach death and also how we are to approach life.

And I can sum it up in a four letter word. A word seldom used in the Bible, and a word often passed over easily in our delineation of the three theological virtues. Yet, where would we be without it? How could we live – or die - without it? Imagine .. imagine a life without hope. Not the kind of hope like, “Hope it doesn’t snow.” “Hope the Flames win.” “Hope I get to church on time.” But the kind of hope suggested in this evenings readings and from another several phrases that we often pass over all too lightly.

Have you ever noticed that when we recite the Apostles’ Creed, we get to the end and roll right through the final phrases without giving much thought to their significance. And yet, those three final phrases tell us so much. We state our belief in “the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.” Where would we be without the communion of saints, the whole family of God, living and dead? Where would we be without forgiveness of sins? Where would we be without the promised resurrection of the body? Where

would we be without life everlasting? Where would we be? We would be nowhere. In a world with no hope.

But the world we live in is God's world, a world where hope is ever sustaining. When we understand that we are in God's world, our perspective shifts. We see that we live in a world where through Jesus Christ, God has made God's will known to humankind. Where our sins are forgiven. Where through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are promised eternal life. We see that we are part of God's history, where the bad will pass away and the good will be preserved. And where our lives on earth become a journey to everlasting life.

And this hope for the future, for the "not yet," permeates the here and now. When we truly place our trust in God's promise of everlasting life, whatever trials and tribulations befall us, and even our own inevitable passing from life on earth, we will be sustained by hope. Whatever may happen in this life, we will endure.

This is why hope is the one word that boldly states the meaning of Christian life. And why we can pray as the Psalmist, "For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling."

Amen.