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Wisdom of Solomon 3: 1 – 9
 Revelation 21: 1 – 6a

Ps. 24
 John 11: 32 – 44

“But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be a disaster, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace.”

How are we to understand this passage in the light of current events? I wrote this sermon in the week that had as just some of its headlines:

- 1) the investigation into the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, American resident and journalist, of Saudi Muslim descent;
- 2) the apparently racist gunning down of two middle-aged African-Americans at a Kroger’s in Jeffersontown, KY;
- 3) the sending of 13 pipe bombs through the mail to Democratic leaders and other vocal critics of the present administration;
- 4) the brutal murder of 11 Jewish worshipers at the Tree of Life Synagogue in east Pittsburgh, PA;
- 5) yet another school shooting with the death of one student, this time in North Carolina; and now
- 6) the killing of two women and wounding of others at a yoga studio in Tallahassee, FL.

The violence, the divisiveness and the hyper-rhetoric certainly seem to be escalating out of control. It is easy to think that the world is going to hell in a handbasket. In the midst of so much hate-speech, craziness and death on a national level – and that doesn’t even touch events worldwide – how do we understand where God is in all of this? Or perhaps *who* God is in all of this?

It is so easy to be swept up in the maelstrom of cataclysmic bad news, that it can then be very easy to miss Light breaking into our darkness. Light, such as the story of Matthew Sheppard’s remains being interred in the National Cathedral twenty years after he was murdered for being gay. Or Light, such as the story of Prince of Peace Episcopal Church in Gettysburg, PA, which is bringing community residents with diverse viewpoints together in an ongoing conversation entitled “Politics, Facts and Civility.”

Henri Nouwen wrote, “In a world so torn apart by rivalry, anger and hatred, we [Christians] have the privileged vocation to be living signs of a love that can bridge all divisions and heal all wounds.” Today, we celebrate the Feast of All Saints, when we pause to recognize and remember all the people, just like you and me, past, present and those yet to be born, who comprise the Communion of Saints, the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ, in all of its glorious splendor and wonderful variations, but also in all of its own divisiveness, violence and woundedness. The Body of Christ who has such a privileged vocation as to be a living sign of the love that can bridge all divides and heal all wounds.

Today, on the Feast of All Saints, we celebrate all of those people, named and unnamed, who have been a part of the Communion of Saints in the best of times and in the worst of times, those who have shone (and who do shine) the Light of Christ into our dark world. We remember those saints who have helped bind the wounds of the world, and at the same time, have helped *unbind* us from the shrouds of death in which we get so wrapped up. We remember those saints who, like Jesus, call us out

of the tombs in which we have placed one another, or sometimes, ourselves. We remember those who have been, and who are, a clarion call to Light and to Life.

Being a saint, being faithful, as always meant seeking God with all that one is and all that one has, perhaps most especially so in the trying times. After all, how do we begin to understand saints as beacons for our own lives of faith if we don't recognize that the faithful have always lived in a violent, fractured and messy world? How do we learn from them how to let our light shine when all around us looks very dark?

In our reading for Education for Ministry (EfM) this week, we read a brief essay by former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, recounting his experience of and reflection on the events of September 11, 2001, for which he was just a couple of blocks away. He cautions against rushing in with religious words and aphorisms. We can't be too quick to patch over troubles with pious platitudes and rhetoric. Things like "death will be no more" and "God will wipe away every tear" can sound rather hollow when we are trying to make theological sense of evil in the world, especially in its immediate aftermath. Williams writes that "God always has to be rediscovered. Which means God always has to be heard or seen where there aren't yet words for [God]." The saints in the world, the saints in our lives, are the people who help us to do just that. They help us to rediscover God and they draw our attention to where God is speaking, or how God is being made visible, when we are not able to do that for ourselves.

In the reading from the Book of Revelation, the voice that is the glorified Christ says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end." It is a reminder that all of human history is an arc that bends back on itself to come full circle in God. God is our source. And God is our purpose. There is nothing in human history that is not encompassed in God. There is nothing in our individual lives that is not encompassed in God. Everything we do in life – and in death – is begun, continued and ended in God. We are continually reminded of this by the presence of the Communion of Saints, that great cloud of witnesses that stretches through time and space to be present with us in every age and in every place. They remind us of the hope that is ours in Jesus Christ.

Today, I invite you, on your way back from communion, to pause and remember those particular saints, those particular witnesses, who have helped you discover or rediscover God. I invite you to tie a ribbon onto the clooty wreath as you say their names, silently or aloud and give thanks for the light they have brought into your darkness.

And in between now and then, in fact in just a few moments, we will be welcoming the newest member of the Body of Christ, the newest little saint in the whole Communion thereof, Coraline. Listen carefully to the words we say as all of us reaffirm our own baptismal covenants. The things which we promise here today are what enable us to be the Communion for her. We are the ones that will help her to discover God. We are the ones who will be the light of Christ on her path. We are the ones to teach her how to be a living sign of a love that can bridge all divisions and heal all wounds. We are the ones who will someday be the saints that she will remember. And she will know from the example that we set, that being a saint, being faithful, means seeking God with all that we have and all that we are, most especially in the trying times. +