

Sermon

All Saints' Episcopal Church

The Rev. Kimberly Jackson
Proper 20C
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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you our sustainer and redeemer. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Good morning, All Saints'.

I am thrilled to finally be here! While my six week sabbatical was exactly what I needed in order to be ready to jump in here with both feet, it feels like this has been a long time coming. So, I'm grateful, truly grateful for this day.

Now, I must admit up front that Martha gave me way too much lead time to prepare for this sermon. She let me know that I would be preaching on this day over two months ago, and I found myself reading the lessons over and over all of these weeks as if I was studying for the LSATs, or preparing for my Olympic debut. And I felt all of the anxiety that comes with such preparation.

But in all of my studying and praying for this sermon, I found myself circling back around not to today's gospel reading, but to the opening collect: **"Grant us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly."**

Now friends, it's too early in our relationship for me to explain all of the sources of my anxiety surrounding joining you all here at All Saints', so I'll share a different story instead:

During my last year of graduate school, I found myself in a predicament that many people who are newly in love experience. It was Thanksgiving break and I was in a very serious relationship (we're married now) and I couldn't figure out if I should go home to visit my parents, or take the opportunity to start a new Thanksgiving tradition with this person that I hoped to spend the rest of my life with.

Because I couldn't make up my mind, I procrastinated and fretted over what to do. Late Wednesday morning, as I was packing my car to make the trip home, I was still filled with anxiety, when my friend Alicia called to see if she could have lunch with us before she left to see her family.

Just after the three of us sat down for lunch, my now, brother-in-law, knocked on the door. Chris was in Atlanta to go partying with his college friends over the break, and was stopping by to offer Trina a ride home. He also came by to make sure that we knew that an ice storm was coming towards Atlanta.

Now this was before Snowmeggadon, so we weren't paying any attention at all to this so called "storm." And honestly, I was just still wrapped up in my own anxieties about not knowing where to spend Thanksgiving. ... about not wanting to disappoint my parents or my significant other. And like me, everyone in that room was wrestling with their own anxieties that often accompany the holidays. Our lunch ended up being quite leisurely, but we were all committed, *kind of*, to getting on the road that evening.

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But by the time the dishes were put away, it was snowing – hard. I remember standing in the window - the four of us, staring at all of the snow and slush on the road as reality slowly descended upon us - we could not leave. We, four adults, would have to spend Thanksgiving in a tiny studio apartment that had no dining room table and virtually no food in the fridge.

When we woke up on Thanksgiving Day, the roads were completely iced over and the grocery store in walking distance was closed. The only place that was open was a CVS located a very icy half mile away. We put plastic bags over our tennis shoes (no one had boots!) and slid to CVS where we bought our Thanksgiving meal:

Turkey jerky, boxed macaroni & cheese, canned green beans and stove top stuffing. That evening, we served dinner on our floor table – a reclaimed tabletop that had no legs.

The food was – horrible. But the experience, that experience was heavenly. There we sat, an odd little group: a white girl from Agnes Scott, a Georgia Southern football player, my archeologist girlfriend, and me... laughing and sharing, finding true gratitude in the simplest of things: friends. gathered. at. table.

My siblings in Christ, in seasons of anxiety, today's collect reminds us to place our focus on things heavenly. Put another way, in times of uncertainty or dis-ease, we are to find and recognize those moments when heaven breaks through.

Now let me be clear: The food may be horrible. The new job *is* daunting. Your children might seem spiteful. This transition *will* feel overwhelming at times. But my friends, the good news for you and me today is that heaven always break through!

Heaven shows up in the sound of laughter coming from the children next door. Heaven breaks through in the sharing of stories with your kin. Heaven shines brightly when someone chooses to forgive us even though we didn't apologize.

Even in today's gospel, for the people whose debts were reduced, and for a manager who almost lost his job, heaven broke through!

On my first day here I arrived a little early. As I stood at the door, not knowing how to get inside, I started to fret and grow anxious about being here. But then Reese came around the corner, and Tremaine walked up the steps, at the same time Martha pulled into the lot. Each greeted me with a smile, my anxieties began to fall away, and a piece of heaven broke through.

It's like a star bursting through a blanket of darkness: heaven disrupts our anxieties and allows us to encounter the real and practical love of God.

The invitation for us today is to allow the Holy Spirit to change our focus away from things that cause us anxiety, and to turn our attention to the spaces where heaven is breaking through.

Let us pray: **"Grant us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly." Amen.**