

**All Saints Sunday
Holy Comforter Church
The Rev. John E. Shields
November 1, 2009**

We live in a time of disruption and change. Sometimes even the good changes can be a bother and a nuisance.

We have a lot of red mud around here these days. During the week, we often have a lot of traffic and noise.

And we have a gracious amount of various kinds of fences: metal, chain link, plastic, silk and in a variety of colors.

We also have new walls and floors and windows and doors – a new building taking shape and growing each week.

Even when something new and great is being developed, we have to acknowledge that our lives are disrupted – our routines and patterns are changed, and many times we are inconvenienced.

Of course our inconveniences here at Holy Comforter are really minor, and our disruptions have a fairly predictable end in sight. However, much of the world and even our own small corners of that world, have many more serious problems, and it sometimes seems that disruption, and fragmentation is all about us.

How do we choose to let these changes in life and in our environment affect us?

We are Christians, members of the church - the church - which is also known and referred to as the ‘Body of Christ’.

Is the body of Christ disrupted and fragmented like much of the world – is it messy - like a construction site?

Well, it is certainly stretched and pulled from time to time.

But I want to say to you this morning that the church – the body of Christ is alive and well (warts and all) in the midst of a confusing, fragmented and dangerous world.

That is not to say that the church is a static entity that will forever and always remain the same. No – it will change in many ways that we do not even begin to know. However, even changed, the church will continue its mission of affirming the victory of love over hate; hope over despair and life over death.

The prayer book is such a blessing --- it sometimes sneaks up on me while I am conducting a service. For instance, I am always struck and moved by this prayer that is found in the Marriage ceremony:

“...Grant that the bonds of our common humanity, by which all your children are united one to another, and the living to the dead, may be so transformed by your grace, that your will may be done on earth as it is in heaven; where, O Father, with your Son and the Holy Spirit, you live and reign in perfect unity, now and for ever...”

We the living, are being connected to one another and to the dead.

Do you feel connected?

I hope you feel connected, because being connected overcomes being fragmented and feeling overwhelmed by change and disruption.

Are there those times, places and situations where you feel a particular connection to someone, maybe even someone long gone from this world, but you still have that sense of them being near by?

Today we remember ‘all the saints who from their labors rest.’

We remember those folks who have gone before and confessed the name of Jesus.

We remember all those great saints who have gone before us, and whose confession of Jesus as Lord has paved our way and been a light on our path.

What a great day to have baptisms and bring into Christ’s church new folks to confess the name of Jesus.

Yes, today we bring people into the body of Christ.

Do you remember those special people in your life who by faith - before the world – confessed the name of Jesus?

Remember!

To remember is to be reconnected to the person recalled.

Remember - the word its self is interesting: Re-member -- to bring the members back together.

We are re-memembering today. We are re-joining the members of the body of Christ --- the living to the dead and we are also bringing new members into that body.

In a few minutes we will hear the names of those members of our parish who have died in the past year. In hearing their names we remember all that they were to us, and what they meant to this parish family. We reconnect with them as we remember.

But, thanks be to God, we also remember by re-membering the body of Christ through the newly baptized we are bringing in today. We remember and we add to those who have gone before with these brand new Christians.

Yes, there is fragmentation and disruption out there in our very dangerous world.

But we are here this morning dear friends, to re-member – to reconnect and celebrate that grace, which has transformed the bonds of our very humanity through which we are united to one another – united into the Body of Christ and are sustained in that body to live in the power of Christ’s resurrection.

One of the unique features of Holy Comforter Church is the memorial garden.

While it is sacred space that is set aside for Christian burial, it is also a lovely outdoor garden where buffet lines are formed around tables weighed down with barbeque and all the ‘fixins’.

While it is a space of solemn and cherished memories, it is also a space where two year olds pat and splash in the fountain – getting their Sunday dresses and suits wet and wrinkled.

Indeed, in our sacred space where the remains of loved ones are interred, Easter eggs are hidden and children’s games are played, adults catch up with each other in shared conversation with lemonade and refreshments. In a place that acknowledges

death and honors the dead, life is lived, celebrated and affirmed.

“Grant that the bonds of our common humanity, by which all your children are united one to another, and the living to the dead, may be so transformed by your grace, that your will may be done on earth as it is in heaven; where, O Father, with your Son and the Holy Spirit, you live and reign in perfect unity, now and for ever.”