

**- Saint John's Pulpit (Nov. 13, All Saints Sunday) -
"Two Questions" John 14:1-6**

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ² In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴ And you know the way to the place where I am going." ⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

All Saints Sunday 2022

As we are keeping this Sunday All Saints Sunday, on behalf of the St. John's community, I'd like to give you all my deepest sympathy for the loss of your family and loving ones. I know that you miss these people every day and every moment. Amid our grief and sadness, the reason why we can celebrate their lives, they are with the Lord in His Kingdom. This is what we read from the text today. And to all of us, this invitation is still good and alive.

This morning, I'd like to share my conversation with Maxine Marshall, one of the Saints today with you, which is very special and mysterious to me. It happened on Sep. 6 (Tuesday) afternoon at her residence. I was told that she just entered a hospice care and got a request to visit her from her nephew Chip. Her doctor told her family that Maxine has minimum of six weeks to maximum of six months which made Maxine anxious seriously.

One beautiful Tuesday afternoon in September, I visited her. Some of you know that her hearing is not good. Although I have tried to give her a phone call every week, our actual chatting time is at best one or two minutes because we both couldn't continue our conversation because of her hearing issue. Maxine's care nurse brought a pen and notebook to me, so I could communicate with her by these old-fashioned but very effective communication tools! It was very fun and joyful. I did not have to speak English fluently! Just writing my message in a notebook, then Maxine smiled

at me and spoke her message. While we were enjoying this new communication method, Maxine's question ensued. It was her first question.

"Pastor, do you believe in the Kingdom of Heaven?"

At this question, when I saw her, she seemed serious and clear. Her serious question made me completely forget to write down my response in the notebook, I was telling her "yes, I believe in the Kingdom of God. You also will go when you are ready, and you will see your loved ones, including your husband."

To my response, Maxine smiled at me and told me. "Pastor J.W. thank you for your clear response." "I look forward to seeing all whom I love there." Then, her second question was followed.

"Pastor, do you believe in Jesus Christ, and what He did in the Bible?" Please know that I am a pastor. An ordained pastor since 1999. Maxine's question might be more appropriate for the Children's message. But you should have seen her eyes full of seriousness and Spirit! I could not be upset but tried to answer that question as best as I could.

"Well, Maxine, of course, I believe in Jesus Christ. I also believe that He did in the Bible." To be honest, at that time, Maxine's questions were not likely from herself, but from someone above.

After my response, Maxine smiled at me and told me:

"Thank you so much for your clear and honest response. It makes me happy and comfortable. Thank you!"

Later I knew that I did not see and feel her hearing issue at all only at that moment. All this communication was done without a pen and notebook, but by verbal communication loud and clear! I have no idea how Maxine could hear me. Did he look at my lips and my mouth moving direction? Probably yes, but I don't buy it. I still believe that it was a very mysterious experience between Maxine and me before her moving to Heaven. Two weeks later, Maxine went home with the Lord in peace. She is no longer with us. But the two questions from Maxine are still in my heart and mind: Kingdom and Jesus.

Here is a question for you. What do you expect from the Kingdom of God? We have no idea whether it is fully made of gold and diamond. Or whether it was full of honey and milk. Or whether it has five stars restaurants, fitness clubs, and spas. But to all people, one common expectation is here. We will meet all we love! Yes, the Kingdom of God is a symbolic place to meet together. As we can sing from one of the old hymns, "*I will meet you in the morning (I. G. Martin)*" we all sing its refrain happily: I will meet you, I will meet you, just inside the Eastern Gate over there; I will meet you, I will meet you, I will meet you in the morning over there.

However, what are Christians doing now? Especially in our denomination, what are all Methodists doing? Surprisingly, we are working on how to separate and when to farewell now. Don't you think this is irony? In the Lord's Prayer, we recite "thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven" But sadly, it seems that people have no idea about thy will. If we truly believe in the Kingdom of God, our language should be always inclusive and good enough to embrace and invite all. Just as Jesus who was hung on the cross was inviting one of the criminals to Paradise, we people of the Kingdom spare no efforts to embrace all.

As we can see from the story today Jesus identifies himself as the way, the truth, and the life. In his ministry, Jesus wanted to be the way for others. When no one wanted to pass through Samaria because of the long-lasting hatred and conflict among Jewish people against the Samaritans, Jesus went through Samaria and met the unnamed Samaritan woman. From Jesus, the woman found the truth and could live a new life as the first missionary for the Samaritans. If we are people of Jesus, don't you think that we need to become the way, the truth, and the life for others? After all, Jesus wanted to become a friend to all and did his best to invite all to the Kingdom.

Let's go back to the conversation with Maxine. To me, the two keywords- Kingdom and Jesus refreshed my ministry vision and sharpened my insight. I believe that recapitulating Kingdom and Jesus is the holy harvest from the Lord in celebrating this year's Thanksgiving. And hope you do the same. To wrap up my sermon, I'd like to share one of my favorite gospel music with you. It is "Friends" by Michael W. Smith which would be a good gift to all saints today and to you all.

"Friends" by Michael W. Smith

Packing up the dreams God planted
In the fertile soil of you
Can't believe the hopes He's granted
Means a chapter in your life is through
But we'll keep you close as always
It won't even seem you've gone
'Cause our hearts in big and small ways
Will keep the love that keeps us strong

**And friends are friends forever
If the Lord's the Lord of them
And a friend will not say never
'Cause the welcome will not end
Though it's hard to let you go
In the Father's hands we know
That a lifetime's not too long
To live as friends**

With the faith and love God's given
Springing from the hope we know
We will pray the joy you'll live in
Is the strength that now you show
But we'll keep you close as always
It won't even seem you've gone
'Cause our hearts in big and small ways
Will keep the love that keeps us strong

**And friends are friends forever
If the Lord's the Lord of them
And a friend will not say never
'Cause the welcome will not end
Though it's hard to let you go
In the Father's hands we know
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