# November 1, 2026

# The Dead Are Still Speaking

*By Pr. Beate Chun*

## The Dead are still speaking

Grace to you and peace
from the one who is
and the one who was
and the one who is to come.

Churches are interesting places.
Among other things,
churches are places
where the dead are still speaking.

Let me repeat that:
Churches are places
where the dead are still speaking.

Think about it.
We read texts
written by people
who lived thousands of years ago.

Some pieces of our liturgy
go back to the first, second,
third centuries—
and we still say
and sing those words.

We sing songs
composed hundreds of years ago.
Well, some of them.
There are exceptions.

And then we are fortunate
to worship in this beautiful, historic building.
This church was constructed in 1907
and dedicated in 1908,
and just this year
it was officially designated
a San Francisco historic landmark.

The pews on which we sit,
the stained-glass windows
through which the sun shines—
all of these are gifts
from people who lived
before we came around.

And then there is
that beautiful stained-glass window
over the altar,
the one that tells
the story of the resurrection.
It was given to this congregation
by Helene Strybing,
who died in 1926.
She is gone.
But through this window
she still speaks to us.
Every Sunday.
Every day.

And you can probably
add other names
and other gifts
to the list.
Look around.
Listen.

## Listening to the Dead

All around us,
the dead are still speaking.
Not loudly.
You have to notice.
You have to listen.

And what do they say?
What do you hear?
What do you hear
when you listen to the dead?

We might assume
that they are speaking to us
about the past.
Maybe they are taking
a trip down memory lane—
just as I do
whenever I get together
with longtime friends.

“Remember when...?”
Remember the time
we went backpacking in Portugal?

Remember the time
we baked a cake
and got the sugar
and salt mixed up?

Remember the time
we learned to develop photographs
in the darkroom—
and someone couldn't find the fixer,
and turned on the light
to look for it,
and the whole film was ruined?

So many memories.
Good times.
Silly mistakes.
And some hard times
mixed in as well.

That is what we often do
when we remember the dead.
We remember.
We tell stories.
We laugh.
We cry.

We say:
“Remember when?”

But is that
what the dead are saying to us?
What do you hear?

## John of Patmos

There was a man
whose name was John.
Not John the disciple
and not the John who wrote the Gospel.
A different John.
A Christian prophet
who lived toward the end
of the first century
in the part of the world
we now call Turkey.

He was living through
a time of great pressure
and suffering for Christians.
He had been exiled
to the island of Patmos,
about 60 miles away from the
mainland.

And there,
on that island,
John heard the dead speaking.

John received a vision.
He saw.
He heard.
And he wrote down
what he had seen and heard.

He  saw and heard the dead people singing!
He saw them
in a place of astonishing beauty.
While there was chaos
and hardship

and fear all around John,
the dead were singing
in a place of beauty and order
and joy.

A great multitude
that no one could count,
from every nation,
from all tribes
and peoples
and languages.

Angels all around.
The living creatures.
The elders.
God on the throne.
Christ in their midst.

And so much beauty.
So much joy.

And these dead—
their joyful voices—
they were not singing
about the past.
They were singing
about the future.
God's future.

A future of justice.
A future of peace.
A future where there is
no more hunger,
no more thirst,
no more suffering,
and where God
wipes away every tear
from their eyes.

## The Joyful Song of the Dead

No more hunger.
No more thirst.

No more tears.

Let’s stay there for a moment.
Let's not rush past it.
Because it feels so
strange and far away
so different from the
supposed real world.

Every day
we are confronted
with news of a world
filled with hunger and thirst,
with grief and suffering,
with wars and violence,
with the terrible things
human beings can do
to one another.

This is our world,
the world we live in.
We see it.
We hear about it.
We carry it with us.

And yet John sees
another reality.

The dead are not speaking
from the past.
They are speaking
from the future.

## Voices from the Future

The dead are
speaking
from the future which God has prepared.

A future of beauty.
A future of peace.
A future of justice.
A future of joy.

A future for us.
A future for all the earth.
A future for the whole cosmos.

And here is the strange thing:
For us,
that future
is still the future.
But for the dead,
it is the present.
It is their reality.
They are already there.

And from there,
they are calling to us.
Encouraging us.
Reminding us
where all of this is going.

## Observing All Saints Sunday

Today is All Saints Sunday,
a day when we remember
and honor the dead.

We remember those
we have known and loved in this life,
those whom we miss
so very much.

And we remember
those who have suffered.
Those who have walked
the road of grief.
Those who have been
victims of tyranny
and violence and sin.

Those whose names we know.
And those whose names
are known only to God.

We remember them.

Because we promised
to remember.
And not to forget.

## Remembering Well

Remembering
is not the same
as living in the past.

The dead are not calling us
to live in the past.
They are calling us
to look forward.
To remember the future God has promised.

So what is the best way
to honor the dead?
I would say:

The best way
to honor the dead
is to listen to them.

To listen
the way John of Patmos listened.
To listen for those voices
coming to us from the future.
To remember that future.
To remember it well.
To think of it often.
To allow it to shape the way we live now.

Because if God's future
is a world of peace,
then we practice peace now.

If God's future
is a world of justice,
then we work for justice now.

If God's future
is a world where no one
is hungry or thirsty,
then we feed people now.

If God's future
is a world where every tear
is wiped away,
then perhaps we become
people who notice tears now.

And if God's future
is a world of beauty and joy,
then we make room
for beauty and joy now.

Not because
we can make God's future happen
by ourselves.
We can't.
But because
we have heard the song.
We have heard the promise.
We know where the story is going.
And that changes
how we live
in the middle of the story.

The dead are still speaking.
Not “Remember when?”
But:
“Remember what is coming.”

Remember the future.
Live toward it.
Walk toward it.
Pray toward it.
Work toward it.
Trust it.

Because this too
is what it means
to be the church:

a place where the dead
are still speaking
and a place
where we remember ...the future.

So today,
We listen
And we remember the future.

**Amen.**

**Sermon for Sunday, November 1, 2026 - Reformation Sunday**

**Presented at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church San Francisco**

**Texts: Revelation 7:9-17 NRSVue - The Multitude from Every Nation - After - Bible Gateway**

**Matthew 5:1-12 NRSVue - The Beatitudes - When Jesus saw the - Bible Gateway**

**Tags: All Saints | Honoring the Dead | The Past and the Future | the Book of Revelation**