November 1, 2026
All Saints Day, Year A
Revelation 7:9-17
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Norwood, MA
Pastor Amanda L. Warner

Gathered at the River

Ever since I left my family home, the home in which I grew up, to go to college, except for my summer jobs, I have always been able to walk to work.

When I was in college at Susquehanna University, I lived on campus all four years, and could walk to my classes and meetings for my job as a student. I went to seminary right after I graduated from college and there, too, I lived on campus and could walk to my classes and to my campus job in the seminary library. When I did my internship in Jacksonville, Florida, the congregation I was serving rented a patio home apartment for the vicar in the neighborhood next to the church so I could walk to my job there. Prince of Peace, the congregation I served in Brookfield, Connecticut had a parsonage next door to the church, so I could walk to it with ease. And of course, here at Emmanuel I have my shortest "commute" ever, with the church building a hop, skip, and a jump from my back door. I must say, it's been nice.

But for the past two weeks I've been getting a taste of real commuting because I've had to take John to a program in Concord every day. He has to be there at 8:45 in the morning and to be picked up at 3:15 in afternoon, so I've gotten to do a lot of rush hour commuting for the past two weeks. It's added something to my prayer list. I know pray regularly for people who have to do that kind of driving day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year.

I have to do it for a few weeks, maybe a month, and then John's program will be over and I'll go back to my regular life. But for the clearly very many people who are all on the road with me as I make my commute, that is that day to day working life reality. I pray for them and if that's you, I pray for you.

The only thing that is making the drive in any way tolerable is that fact that we're having such a stunning fall, so I'm driving through absolutely beautiful landscapes. It's just 95 (or 128, if you're from around here), then rt. 2, so I'm not exactly driving through beautiful country, I

know, but the color on the trees, against the bright blue skies are just gorgeous and it fills me with joy and wonder. "The heavens are telling the glory of God!"

I know I'm driving John crazy because every day I go on and on about the beauty of the landscape we're driving through. But I just can't help myself and I want to make sure that I don't become numb to it or take it for granted. I wish I didn't have to do this tedious drive every day, but since I do, I might as well keep my eyes open to the beauties around me.

There's one part of the drive, except for the traffic, though, that isn't beautiful at all. And it's the Hobbs Brook Reservoir in Waltham. I drive past it every day. Four times. Slowly. And in the two weeks that I've been making this drive what I've noticed is that its water levels are down. Way down. There's expansive shoreline where there used to be water. There are rocks jutting out of the water that used to be covered. And in the two weeks that I've been making this drive twice daily, back and forth to and from Concord, I would say that the water levels have gotten lower. More shoreline, more rocks, less water. It feels like a crisis. It feels catastrophic. It feels like we've all lost our minds, just going about our daily business, our daily commutes while right in front of us, the water we need to live dries up.

I let myself hope that maybe I was wrong, that maybe the water I was driving past every day wasn't a source of water for the communities around it. Maybe it was just a regular pond or lake. Maybe it was a source of hydroelectric power, like Candlewood Lake was where I used to live in Brookfield, where the water levels were raised and lowered in response to area power needs. I kind of knew that wasn't the case, but I hoped.

So, I looked it up and learned that my worries were justified. The body of water I was worried about is called the Hobbs Brook Reservoir and it provides water to the city of Cambridge. When it is full it holds 2.5 billion gallons of water and reaches a maximum depth of 25 feet. Right now, because of the drought we've been experiencing in this area, the reservoir is down to 20% of capacity. It currently holds 500 million gallons. Which sounds like a lot, but is way less than what is needed to supply the water needs of a city of close to 123,000 people certainly over the long term.

So, in the middle of my drive, which I already don't particularly want to be doing I have this existential concern, of water being dried up and used up and the implications of that for

environmental concerns, the fish and birds and plant life that depend on that reservoir's ecosystem for their lives, and for human thriving.

Today is All Saints Day. November 1st. A day when we remember the saints of the church, well known and celebrated as exemplars of Christian faith and a day when we remember our own saints, those who have shaped our lives of faith with their guidance, teachings, example, those who have died in the past year, since last All Saints Day and those who might have died longer ago.

Today, this festival in the church when we remember all saints and our saints, is a baptismal festival. In fact, in a document called *The Use of the Means of Grace* the ELCA's teaching document on the sacraments, a document that I use when I teach the Confirmation class about Baptism, recommends All Saints Day as one of the days on which congregations should schedule its baptisms and affirmations of baptism, because of its focus on Baptism. We aren't always able to do that because of the realities of people's schedules, but it's nice when we can. 23 years ago, at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Britton and I scheduled Abigail's baptism on All Saints Sunday, which that year was on November 2nd, Abigail's baptismal anniversary.

Though we don't have a baptism or an affirmation of baptism today the font is out, in its central place, filled with water, as a reminder, to all of us that it is through the waters of baptism, that we are connected to Jesus' death and resurrection, that we step into the river of God's grace, that we experience the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The font is out today as a reminder that that it is through these waters that we are invited and given strength to live lives of faith. The font is out today to remind us that it through this water of love and life that we become saints.

And today we are reminded of those saints who have gone before us, who walked the same roads with us, through this broken and heartbreaking world. Today we are surrounded in our sanctuary and in our hearts by their names, by their stories, by the promise that they meet us at the table. And while our journey, our struggle continues, theirs is finished. They have laid their burdens down. They have been set free.

This is a sermon about saints. It is also a sermon about water. Because of those lives of faith that we are called and empowered to live, we have to live with our eyes open to the ways

in which the well being of the earth, the animals, the ecosystems, and the lives of our neighbors are threatened. Dried up reservoirs and riverbeds should be a wakeup call, calling us not to anxiety but to action. And while we cannot make it rain, we should be concerned about water consumption and conservation. We should be concerned about water safety and water access for all people, in our own local communities and around the world. We who, as Christians, have water as a central symbol of and channel of God's grace, we for whom water is directly tied to our sacramental life, should care and care deeply in a way that moves us to knowledge and actions about our own local watersheds and water justice throughout the world.

Knowing and caring for and conserving and acting on behalf of the water that every living thing in the world counts on for survival is a way of being peacemakers, is a way of seeking righteousness, is a way of being pure in heart, is a way of showing mercy. God has chosen to be revealed through water, through storms and seas and rain and rivers and fonts. When we care for the waters around us, we grow closer to God.

And then there's heaven. Where those saints we miss, those saints we love, those saints we remember, those saints we celebrate, live. And it is a place of water, a place where water flows abundantly, where there will never be any worry about the water drying up, never any worry that there will not be enough for all, never any worry at all, ever again, for anything, because their every need will be met, as they worship around God's throne.

They have their every need met from the abundance of God's hand. Our reading from Revelation for today, shares that vision with us, the vision of heaven that tells us the ultimate destination of our saints and all saints:

> They will hunger no more and thirst no more;
>
> the sun will not strike them,
>
> nor any scorching heat,
>
> for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd,
>
> and he will guide them to springs of the water of life,
>
> and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."
>
> (Revelation 7:16-17)

Today, as the saints on earth, we have a calling on our lives, to seek peace and justice and mercy for all people and for all of God's beloved creation. That is our labor, the labor of the people of God, who have been washed in the waters of baptism and who in whatever way that we are able, follow Jesus on the way.

But someday, with the saints of God who have gone before us, we will worship, we will rejoice. Our worries, our sorrows, our burdens, will be laid down on the banks of the ever-flowing river of God, our every tear will be wiped away, and with the saints of God, with all saints and with our saints, we will rest. Thanks be to God. Amen.