

Pastor Gwen's Sermon
 All Saints Sunday
 "For All the Saints"
 Sunday, November 3, 2024

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN!

Today is All Saints Day. It is believed that as early as 300 C.E. there was a day to commemorate all the martyrs. These martyrs were ones who were persecuted and died for their faith in Jesus Christ. It is hard to imagine, but there are still a few places left on earth where that is happening today. Many of you probably remember days when the Roman Catholics and Protestants were still fighting in Northern Ireland. Today we do hear the stories about the war in the Middle East over land and religion. People today even consider the war on terrorism, a religious war. The only one in our country, at least during my lifetime, that has died for her faith was Cassie, a young girl at Columbine High School who was shot when she declared that she believed in God.

But today we hold this day special as we remember the saints in our lives. Not necessarily ones that have died for their faith like a martyr. I believe that saints are those who die in the faith. What I mean by that is that you do not have to die **for** your faith like the martyrs of old, but you die in the faith. You die believing that Jesus Christ is your Savior and Lord. And a saint's faith in Jesus is portrayed during their lifetime to others. Truly, there have been a multitude of saints that have gone before us. There are also many living saints around us.

A saint is someone who has introduced us to the faith. A saint is someone who has helped us explore the Christian faith. A saint is someone who has nurtured us in the Christian life. A saint is someone who has shown us Jesus by living a Christian life.

Saints are special people that God places in our lives to share their faith with us. Have you ever heard the statement that faith is caught not taught? Well, saints are those people who have shared with us their own walk with Jesus Christ.

Those of you with a super memory may recall my speaking about my grandma Brown on occasion. She was one of the early saints in my life. She shared her faith journey with me. When I was young, I would stay overnight at her house. Every morning she got up and before her weak green tea with cream, she would sit at her kitchen table and read her lessons. First, she would read her Bible verses for the day that she had marked on Sunday when she returned from church. Then she would read her commentary that told her about that part of Scripture she just read. She had bright

colored ribbons in that book to mark her pages, chalk to mark verses and really neat metal tabs in her Bible. And then when she finished reading out loud, she said a prayer and her day could begin. Grandma Brown was not a Lutheran. She believed that God was love and all things came from the love God had for us. Reading the Bible every day, worshipping on Sunday, praying were the marks of faithful discipleship she taught and passed on to me.

On All Saints Day I remember Grandma and the other saints in my life. I give thanks to God that He placed them in my life. I give thanks to God that those saints took time to live and share their faith with me. I am sure that you have many saints in your life as well. Think for a minute about who your saints are.

When, I moved away from St Olaf a little over 13 years ago, I was worried about leaving all of my living saints behind. Many people in that congregation helped to shape my faith in Christ. When I first joined St Olaf, there was a woman named Corrine who taught me the importance of serving others at funeral luncheons. I was taught to write about each funeral luncheon in a book that spanned over 50 years. What a legacy those women had for caring for those that are grieving.

Another woman named Elaine taught my daughter, my son and I to roll lefse. She also taught the children how to how to make unleavened bread just like the Israelites had to as they were escaping Egypt. She boldly told them that story as they were in the church kitchen.

At St Olaf we had a group of assisting ministers who helped to led worship each Sunday, teachers who worked with the children, musicians who used their talents to enhance our worship experience, and so many more members that did countless other ministries, were all my living saints. As they shared their faith in Jesus Christ with my family, they let their love of God show in all their services.

Pastor Larry from St Olaf, who was my spiritual mentor when I was new to serving the Lord, has been here at Christ the Servant. He shared his faith with you at my ordination, as well as from the pulpit as a representative of the ELCA Foundation. Tom Ziebell, who was a special spiritual friend was here 11 years ago with his worship band to praise the Lord during a Sunday service. Then there is my best friend Jill who has walked with me through many spiritual crisis. All these people are saints to me. Over time, both near and far, they have shared their faith with me in very personal and special ways. And through me they continue to show how God is working in the lives of all the saints.

Just two weeks ago we had a band called Breaking Chains here from the Eau Claire area. They came to Park Falls to this very sanctuary and shared their saintly faith with us. Not only did they sing and play music to enhance and liven our worship experience on consecration Sunday, but they all showed how much they loved Jesus. Michelle read Scripture and made it come alive for us. No doubt in my mind that these folks were our saints that Sunday.

And folks, what we learn, what we hear becomes a part of us and our faith journey. And then those faith experiences pass on to others. The witness of my saints has been shared with you. And that is what Christians do, we share our faith with and through each other. Today at CTS we will see that clearly as we go to coffee hour and listen to each other's stories. Several saints will stay around for Bible study today when we continue to discover how to grow wiser in Jesus as we grow older. We all have saints that have influenced us, and we are all saints to others. So, remembering All Saints

Day is important. It is good that we remember our saints of days gone by and encourage each other to be the saints of today.

In fact, right here in our midst are many saints of this congregation that that have taught me so much about a life of faith. The women who tell their stories over lunch during quilting. Our men who come to Men's group who meets once a month who just visited one of their own, Chuck in the nursing home. And so many more of you that have been a saint to others in our community through working at the backpack program at The Lord's Cupboard, Sleep in Heavenly Peace and so many more opportunities. Because of that life of service to others, we are disciples and saints of a great big God. So today we should all celebrate the fact that we are Christ the Servant and saints!

In our Gospel reading this morning we hear the story about how Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Jesus and his disciples are out preaching in the villages beyond the Jordan. Then they receive word that Lazarus was very sick. Now Lazarus was not just a casual acquaintance of Jesus. Lazarus, along with his two sisters Martha and Mary, were folks that Jesus was extremely fond of and spent a lot of time with. So, one would assume that Jesus would go quickly to his friend's bedside and heal him, but not the case. Jesus takes his time to get to Lazarus. After all, Jesus knew what he was going to do long before he got there. Jesus was going to turn an ordinary healing opportunity into a spectacular miracle.

Mary and Martha did not know what Jesus had in mind, nor did they know what great sermon material Jesus would provide here in waiting these days to see Lazarus. Mary steeped in grief over the death of her brother Lazarus is upset that Jesus did not come sooner for now it is too late; her brother is dead. Then Martha chimes in questioning Jesus and telling Him it is too late. If only Jesus had been there on time, Lazarus might be alive. How many times in our lives have asked the same thing? Why wasn't Jesus there for me? Why isn't Jesus here when I need him? Or why doesn't God hurry up and do something?

Well, Jesus does do something. Jesus weeps. There are volumes of writings by theologians as to why Jesus wept, but that is a subject for another time. I think that we can assume that Jesus is sad because Mary and Martha are grieving over the death of their brother. Jesus' humanity is showing. We also cannot know for sure why Jesus waited before coming to see the family like He did. Another of those mysterious situations I want to ask Jesus about when I see Him face to face.

But Jesus brings their grieving to an end. Jesus raises Lazarus, who was dead for 4 days, to life. Jesus turns a hopeless situation into a joyful reunion. Lazarus is unbound and has a new life. Jesus has the last word against death.

Jesus Christ offers us that new life as well. Jesus went to his death on the cross so that we could have life abundantly. That to me means that we not only will have life eternal, but we can experience a full life here on earth. This life is one where we are not bound, wrapped up or held captive by our sin. Jesus took our sin away in that horrible death he suffered on the cross. So, just as Lazarus gets a new life, we get one too. And all we have to do is have faith that the promises of God are true. God calls us through the Holy Spirit to "come out" and come away from our sin. Just as Jesus called to Lazarus, to start a new life, so we all can experience the new life in Jesus Christ.

In our new life in Christ, we are called to love our neighbor. We are called to unwrap our neighbor in the same way that Jesus unwrapped Lazarus and unwraps us. We are to respond to the call of

Jesus to minister to one another in the same way that those saints who are enjoying new life in Jesus have done for us.

We hear the call of Jesus to be saints to each other. We worship together, we pray for each other, and we become examples of faith to each other. Together we rejoice every time we feel those things that have bound us in our old life, fall away.

Jesus Christ made all of that possible for all faithful followers, for all the saints. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we are given life to live abundantly and when this earthly life is over, we will live in eternity with our Lord and Savior and all the saints. For "Death will be no more." AMEN