

**Sermon: November 1, 2015**  
All Saints' Sunday

Today we commemorate All Saints Sunday. On this day we celebrate the past by giving thanks to God for our great ancestors in the faith, remembering how their lives have enriched our lives. And we also celebrate the present, giving thanks to God for all those faithful people today who show give witness to God's grace through their lives and words and actions. And finally, we celebrate the future, giving thanks for those faithful people who are yet to come. In celebrating all the faithful people past, present and future, we also celebrate that in the end, all of these faithful people will be joined together in the Great Heavenly Feast prepared by God.

It may be interesting to note that there hasn't always been an All Saint's celebration by the church. The earliest record of any festival associated with the saints is somewhere around the eighth century. Prior to that date, there were occasions when a particular church or basilica was dedicated to "All the Saints" or in some cases, "All the Martyrs." On these occasions those faithful people who died as martyrs, or directly because of their faith were named and remembered. it has only been in more recent times that this feast has been expanded from a commemoration of martyrs to a commemoration of all the saints.

We acknowledge on this day that there is a difference in interpretation of what saints are or are not within the Christian church. As Lutherans we believe in saints. But we do not believe as some do that certain saints have special powers over our lives.

As Lutherans we do remember and honor as saints those people who throughout the history of the church have given witness to their faith in Christ. But we do not believe as some do that we need to pray to God through these saints. We believe that we can pray directly to God and do not need anyone to intercede on our behalf.

The reformers back the 1500's made it clear through the words of the Augsburg Confession that they did not object to celebrating saints' days. They believed that the people's faith would be strengthened by imitating the example of the saints. But still they dramatically reduced the number of saints' days to commemorations of biblical persons.

The Lutheran reformers also accepted both definitions of sainthood. One definition of saint applies to all believers. This is the definition of saints used when we say, as part of the Apostles' Creed, "the communion of saints." The other definition applies to those who by their lives give exceptional witness to their faith in Christ.

In many ways, the Feast of All Saints is a celebration of the Christian community. It is not that we turn away from acknowledging the greatness of God. But rather, we celebrate the glory of God that is reflected by those who have gone before us, those who are today in the midst of us, and those who will come after us. It is a celebration of the permanence of the church as well as the people in it. It is a celebration of a community that transcends all boundaries of race and language and condition. It is a celebration that transcends time and space. And, as witnessed to by the story of Jesus and Lazarus in our Gospel lesson, it is a celebration that even transcends the boundaries of death.

The passage begins with grief, that of Mary, Martha, the community and even Jesus. It ends with Jesus commanding Lazarus to rise from the dead. The story foreshadows the story of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection.

Today, on this day commemorating All Saints, we remember those faithful people who confidently blessed and praised the Lord in their lives. They were, and still are, the ones who walk in the glory of the Lord and who reflect that glory onto the lives of others. Some of them, like martyrs of old, lived and died for their faith. To them the church owes a great debt of gratitude.

Some of the greatest saints are those who were ordinary people, living simple lives, and who prayed even the simplest of prayers. You don't have to live a remarkable life to live a holy life. You don't have to have special powers. You don't have to be of great stature. You don't have to pray great prayers, or even do remarkable acts of kindness.

Many of the saints that we celebrate today are people who have touched our lives, ordinary people who shared the faith with us. They may include our mothers and fathers, other members of our families, our neighbors and friends, our pastors and our Sunday School Teachers and our youth group leaders.

Today I especially celebrate St. Harold, my pastor when I was growing up. I celebrate Saints Molly, David, Jan, Phil, Linda and Steve. Who were my Luther League leaders while I as in High School. I celebrate Saints Richard and Saint Marvin who were my mentors in ministry.

Today as part of our All Saints celebration, we remember those members of our congregation who have passed since last All Saints Sunday and have gone on to their heavenly reward: Eleanor Campbell, Donna Harvey, John Hunt, Per Johansen, Bill Kietzer, Jack Lipp, Julie Tegtmeyer Morrison, and Dale Yingst.

We will lift them up in our prayers later in our service. They may not have special days named after them, but they are no less important to us in our lives. For it is through their faith that we have come to know the faith. Because they had the courage to speak of their faith, we have had the privilege of hearing about the grace of God. Because they have shown us how to live that faith, we have the opportunity to share it with others.

They are the blessed saints and so are we. We are the faithful people gathered in the name of Christ. We are all saints of God. Thanks be to God for all of his saints.

May the Lord grant us peace, in the midst of our sorrow and pain. Amen.