

Matthew 5:1-12
November 5, 2017

“All Saints Day”

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As we gather for the 11th year on All Saints Sunday, we desire to give thanks to God for the tremendous gifts of love and life which we have received through each of the people we remember this morning. I don't think I can get very far without admitting that a piece of my heart saddens as I think of missing each of these people. We have partnered together in mission, and worship and fellowship and service; we have shared in bible study, committee meetings, family struggles and milestones, and I am going to miss each of them.

Among the lives we remember are people who just recently were very vibrant, and respected leaders in this congregation, and contributing members of their family and community. These people showed their love for God, for the world, and they deeply and truly loved Emanuel church with all that they had, and all that they are. We will miss them.

Maybe the first bit of good news is a reminder we are not alone in periods of sorrow and grief. When our heart is breaking, God's is with us. Every step of the way God is comforting us and tilling the new soil of hope, planting new life seeds and nurturing them as they take root within us. This All Saints we say thank you to God, not only for the gift of these beloved people, but also because God will not leave us to our own devices as we deal with our sorrow and grief. By Faith we have been given a spirit, the undying love of God, and God's love will not let us go.

But the process of healing does not mean life goes back to the way it was. We may find a life that is far different than before but through this process God returns us to community, to service, to life; God opens a different yet bright future to us. The sorrow may never fully go away, but with God's help we find our way to joy, hope, and life.

So on this All Saints Day I want to thank God, who faced the death of his own son Jesus, and by that very human experience became artfully able to lead us from death to life, from despair to hope, and from fear to trust.

We gather today and call these loved ones “saints” which contrary to popular opinion, does not mean they were perfect people. In our Protestant Christian tradition a saint is someone who lives each moment of their life shaped by simple truths... God calls you by name and claims you, God will do great things through you for others and for the sake of all creation, and you should be ready because God may call the least likely candidate to do most extraordinary things.

This means, even as we are honoring our family and loved ones today, we might think of ourselves as saints in the making. A wise scholar once said, “Your life may be the only bible some people will ever read.” So, what we do each day, how we live our lives, how we respond to people, how we check our own prejudices, how we love, and forgive, and show compassion, and respond to injustice, matters... We Saints in the making are at work each day in our a variety of ministry settings where we live out Christ's claim upon our life.

We see you...

- teaching in schools and universities.
- Working in emergency rooms and on the floors of our hospitals.
- Serving as missionaries and those who offer hospitality to these missionaries.
- We see you in retirement homes organizing social events, worship services and making sure your neighbors are OK.
- And in Sunday School rooms.
- We see you working on our roads and maintaining an infrastructure of what makes our lives possible
- and praying for your neighbors and making sure your neighbors have a hot meal on a day when life is most frazzled.
- We see you in youth and children who gather to raise money for a mission project.
- and in auto mechanics where customers receive an honest job and service at a fair price.
- We see you in farmers who raise healthy, local food.
- And we see you, taking time from the many demands of life, to help, to listen, to share, and to care.

We are the saints of tomorrow, today! And we acknowledge that alongside the lives we remember with lit candles today... God has called us by name; God has promised to do great things through us for others, and for the sake of all creation, and we recognize how God sometimes calls the least likely candidates to do the most extraordinary things.

But before I close, I want to share one more hope that we cling to boldly. I really believe the promises in scripture. I can't explain it but I deeply trust these loved ones, some of who were suffering, some who died before we expected, some who lived a full life yet we still miss them, I really believe they are born into God's eternal presence. It's in the words we share at every graveside service... "In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our lord Jesus Christ, we now commend to God, our sister____, Our brother____, and commit her or him to this resting place."

Our Savior, Jesus Christ, lived, died and lived again to show us the path to eternal life. And, through faith, that is a promise we hold dear. I don't know what heaven is like. Is it a heavenly mansion with many rooms where Jesus comes to take us , or is it a massive banquet table where everyone gathers and eats an abundance of good food. Scripture provides many pictures of eternity, but I trust after we die, our entire life is taken into God and becomes a part of the eternal Spirit which was never born and never dies. Today we rejoice in the promises of that dimension, where everything is made new... where God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death is gone for good—tears gone, crying gone, pain gone—all the first order of things gone." And the Enthroned one says, "Look! I'm making everything new."

God Bless you Saints on earth and in heaven.

Amen.