

The Rev. Joel Petruschke
Our Saviour Lutheran Church
All Saints Sunday
November 1, 2020

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and Brothers in Christ, for as long as I have been serving as a pastor, I have thought that All Saints Sunday is a festival that seems to be somewhat misplaced on the calendar.

What do I mean by that?

Well, our society tends to remember those who have died during the year at the tail end of the year.

As our society plans for the New Year, we tend to look back on the year that was, and we hear newscasters remind us of those who died in the past year.

Newsmagazines will also give us a rundown of the persons to whom we have said "goodbye" in the previous year.

So this year as we approach January 1st, we will be reminded that Ruth Bader Ginsberg died, along with Kobe Bryant, Eddie Van Halen, Regis Philbin, Chadwick Boseman, Jerry Stiller, John Lewis, Kirk Douglas, Bonnie Pointer, and Mary Higgins Clark, to name just a few.

So why don't we, as a church, observe All Saints Sunday closer to the end of the year?

Why has All Saints Sunday been observed at the beginning of November?

Is it because December is taken up with the festivities surrounding Advent and Christmas? Perhaps.

Is it because the end of the CHURCH year falls not at the end of the calendar year but on Christ the King Sunday, which falls at the end of November? Possibly.

Although that bring up yet another question, why doesn't the church year begin closer to New Year's Day, say on Christmas Day?

Why begin a new church year at the beginning of Advent?

PAUSE

So, I did a little research into this question about why All Saints' Day is on November 1st, and All Saints' Sunday is the first Sunday in November.

And what I found out is that—the origins of All Saints Day are uncertain.

There is no consensus on how or when or even why All Saints Day emerged.

Its origin is obscured in the mists of time.

PAUSE

But I would like to believe that the Church decided to begin remembering the saints at this particular time of the year because the season of autumn sort of lends itself to thinking about our mortality.

Indeed, in this season of autumn all around us we see the browning of the landscape.

In this season of autumn all around us we see trees dropping their leaves, and we smell the decay of the flora.

In this season of autumn we experience more frequent gray skies.

In this season of autumn we experience cooler temperatures.

In this season of autumn we experience a paler, almost washed-out sunlight because of the angle the sun's rays strike our earth.

It is not the bright, intense sunlight of summer.

Yes, in this season of autumn we experience almost a stillness, a quietness in nature, as nature makes itself ready for winter.

So, we don't know exactly how early November became the time when we remember our saints, and in turn remember our own mortality, but it does seem a most appropriate time to do so.

And, I don't know about you, but I, personally, do so very much love this season.

I love the autumn season.

Maybe it is because I do have a bit of a gloomy side to me.

My grandmom use to complain that I enjoyed listening too much to “dirges” as she would call them.

She felt that as a teenager I listened to mostly classical music in minor keys.

And I still do like my dirges.

But that is just my personality at times.

Yes, I love autumn season.

And maybe it is because I, and really all of us, have something of autumn in each of us, as Shakespeare said a sonnet, which I recite to you now.

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
 When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
 Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
 Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
 In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
 As after sunset fadeth in the west,
 Which by and by black night doth take away,
 Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
 In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire
 That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
 As the death-bed whereon it must expire,
 Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by.
 This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,
 To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

Shakespeare spoke of autumn that is in all of us.

But because we see autumn in one another, and thus know that we can't remain here forever, we then should love one another all the stronger.

PAUSE

So yes, there something that appeals to me in this season.

And it is not that we are all too feel the full weight of our mortality on All Saints Sunday such that we wallow in depression.

It is not that we are simply to mourn those who have died in the faith.

It is not just about honoring brothers and sisters who have died since last All Saints—Eva Lang, Dave Shadel, Pastor John Lamb, Shirley Logan, Viola Heberle, and our extended list of loved ones in the bulletin.

No, All Saints' Sunday is more than just gloom, and sadness, and lost.

All Saints' Sunday also about the hope of Jesus Christ.

The message of this Sunday is that there is hope, that there is a most certain hope, that there is something larger than this present reality.

That is indeed what the Beatitudes in our gospel reading reminds us this day.

There is more than our present reality.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are meek, those who hunger...

Blessed are they, blessed are all of us...because there is something larger than this present reality.

Blessed are they who experience racial injustice, those who need not have died...

Blessed are they who experience the lost of property and even life in the midst forest fires and hurricanes...

Blessed are they who have experienced illness and death due to COVID-19...

Blessed are they who are unemployed, who businesses have closed during this pandemic...

Blessed are all of these persons who suffer in this world at this time...

They are blessed, we are blessed, mind you, not because we suffer...

This passage about the Beatitudes is not saying that God is causing individuals suffering, so as to bless them...

No, the God we worship does not cause suffering, God does not impose suffering upon people...

This is just the present reality...that as the saying goes, into every life a little rain must fall...

Sometimes it is not just a little rain...it is a typhoon.

But that unfortunately is just the reality we live in. That is the world that is yet not fully redeemed.

It is a world that still is in the throes of sin and death.

PAUSE

But All Saints' Sunday wants to remind us...does remind us, there is something larger than this present reality.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.

There is a larger reality.

And blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

There is a larger reality.

And blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

There is a larger reality.

And blessed are those who experience racial injustice, for they will receive God's justice.

There is a larger reality.

And blessed are those who experience loss of any kind, for they will know the abundance of God.

There is a larger reality.

And blessed are those who cry out for gainful employment, those who desire nothing else than to have the security of livelihood, for they will know the peace of God.

There is a larger reality.

Yes, All Saints is about that larger reality in which we abide even now, and one day know fully.

PAUSE

It is not just this reality, this life, these times, that we recognize as people of the Christian faith.

All Saints' celebrates not just the world as it is, but All Saints celebrates the world as it shall be.

And this...this church... is not all there is then with respect to the gathering of the people of God.

No, there is a much wider, and broader, and more profound reality of God's kingdom and of the church triumphant.

There is a wondrously, larger reality of the communion of saints of which we are but small part here on earth.

All Saints' celebrates the church in heaven and on earth.

Our voices, Friends are but a part of the cacophony of sound ringing out in heaven right now in praise of the eternal God.

Our communion meal is but a part of the heavenly banquet feast in which throngs of millions of people are partaking right now in celebration of the church triumphant.

Our worship is but part of the glorious partying that is happening in the eternal kingdom right now.

Yes, sisters and brothers in Christ, there is most definitely something much larger than the present reality we experience.

There is hope, there is blessedness, there is abundance, and justice, and peace because there is God and the power of God's Son who is redeeming this world from the powers of sin and death.

This is the good news of All Saints' Sunday—what we see, is not all there is...one day the sky will be rolled back as a scroll, the trumpet will sound, and the Lord shall descend...

PAUSE

Yes, I like this season of the year.

I like the autumn season.

But it is because it reminds me of something larger than the present reality.

Because we know, don't we? We know that those barren trees will one day be in full leaf again.

And we know that the brown landscape will become a brilliant green again.

And we know that quiet and the stillness will be filled with the sounds of birds and all sorts of forest murmurs.

We know that there is a larger reality than what we observe at present.

PAUSE

And yes, our human existence, this life, you and me, we do have a sense of autumn in all of us, there has also been planted inside each one of us the seed of spring.

Inside each one of us by the power of Christ's cross has been planted the seed of spring.

There is something larger than the present reality.

All Saints' Sunday reminds us that hope that is larger than view of this present world.

Thanks be to God. Amen.