

November 6, 2016
All Saints Day

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

All Saints Day – a wonderful day in the life of the church. A nice change of pace from the season following Easter and Pentecost known as “ordinary” time in the church calendar year. But just what is All Saints Day? Well, of course, it’s that Sunday the church gathers to remember those saints who have died in the past year. Those who have served faithfully and now rest in the loving arms of God. Here at Bethany and in other congregations we also recognize those new saints who have entered into the body of Christ, which is the church, through Holy Baptism in the last year. And new this year we recognize, honor, and pray for our “senior” saints (those 80 and over) among us whether present today or unable to be with us physically. All Saints Sunday is a glorious Sunday full of celebration and joy because we rejoice in the promise that we will live eternally in the assembly of the saints. It is a Sunday we all need to hear those words that we, too, are saints. That title is not reserved for simply a select few. Being a saint is part of our identity and it is an identity we need to lift up. How many of us daily think of ourselves in that image? In a world in which we have so many titles, wear a plethora of hats, and even have labels attached to us by others perhaps we desperately need this Sunday to hear that identity marker we often don’t associate with ourselves. I suspect if I had each of us list 10 words to describe ourselves “saint” probably wouldn’t make the

list. What if every Sunday during the peace we looked at each other and said these words, “Peace be with you precious saint!” I wonder how our view of one another might change. I wonder how we view ourselves might change.

Today is about claiming the fact we are saints. This is a hat we need to wear more often. This is a title we need to claim for ourselves and also a title we need to image stamped across the forehead of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ – even those we may not get along with so well, even those who may have hurt us, even with those who seem to stand opposed to everything we believe. In a world so muddled by differences and in our current climate where division seems to be widening among us perhaps this is the common ground in which we need to grasp onto in the church. We are all saints – republicans, democrats and independents alike. We are all saints: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Lutherans, Missouri Synod Lutherans, United Methodists, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, Quakers, etc.

With that said, maybe we should give ourselves a big pat on the back. Hip, hip, hooray for us! We are all saints. Indeed we should; but, we also have to be cautious in that we don’t make this day simply about us. About our small community of faith. About honoring just those within the confines of our membership rosters. It’s all too easy for communities of faith to fall into that trap on this day. That is, we gather and forget the One whom makes us saints. The One whom gave His life so that we could be freed from the power of sin. The happy exchange is what Luther deemed it. Christ

Jesus taking upon the sin of humanity in his death and resurrection and granting to us His innocence so that we can stand before God not as a sinner but as a saint. Pure and unconditional grace and love. This is the reason we gather today, every Sunday, and every time on any given day the church gathers. It is never about us but it is always about what God has done, is doing, and will do. We give thanks and celebrate this Sunday for the blessed saints who have gone before us, for the blessed saints God has called and welcomed into the church through baptism, for the senior saints among us who have been vessels of Christ's light helping us and others meander the oft challenging journey of faith that is discipleship and we celebrate the fact each and every one of us is a saint. But we must always do it with lenses focused on the One who is the reason behind the celebration. God who in and through Jesus Christ turned us from sinner to saint and by the power of the Holy Spirit empowers us to believe this to be true.

I read one definition of saint this week that said, "A saint is someone who shines the light of Christ." Each of us gathered radiates with the light of Christ because that light is embedded in us. Yet, so often that light gets diminished because we trust more in things of the world such as fame, fortune, or status. We set our sights on ourselves and our own self-preservation that we put up a barrier to letting the light of Christ shine through us for the world to see. The sinner takes hold and squashes out the saint. We can easily fail to see ourselves as God sees us and also fail to see our neighbor as God

does. And onto the scene comes Jesus' sayings to the disciples and large crowds which had gathered to hear him and be healed by him. Just as Jesus has done before and will continue to do so he delivers words of a kingdom that so often looks vastly different than the worldly kingdom in which we live. We are indeed saints because that is the promise God has made to us through the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ but Jesus alerts us to the fact many others will inherit that kingdom as well. Many others whom the world might overlook. Many others who literally have nothing. Many others whose only source of salvation is found in God – they can't purchase it with their wealth or status. A saint so it would seem is always burning that light of Christ brightly but also always looking for that light burning in the other – even those for whom we may not think the light shines in. By now in our journey through Luke Jesus has made it clear that which seems impossible for humans is possible with God. By now Jesus has made it clear God's kingdom is open to all. By now Jesus has made it clear God's grace knows no limits.

This is all saints day. We are saints not by anything we have done. We are saints solely for what God has done. This is what we celebrate today. This is the good news the lights of our hearts are to radiate with. Grace abounds yet again. Grace moves us to see the saint in the other. Grace moves us to love our enemies. Grace moves us to pray for those who hurt us. Grace moves us to do to others as we would have them do unto

us. Grace moves us to be free from the burden of sin and live into the fullness of the saints we are because of whose we are. Amen.