

All Saints Day – a wonderful day in the life of the church. 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. We also recognize those new saints who have entered into the body of Christ, which is the church, through Holy Baptism. And as we have done for several years, a day in which we give thanks and pray for our "senior" saints among us whether present in this space or worshipping online. 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 this promise that sustains those of us for whom this day may be difficult. Joy and celebration may seem all but impossible. The wounds of a loved one's death are so very real and painful. The tears still come, your heart aches and your body at times is still very weary from your time of grief.

Just two weeks ago, Pastor Gregg Davisson, at the funeral of Amanda's dad proclaimed to those gathered and into the grief we were enduring, "Because of Jesus we do not grieve as those who have no hope. We grieve because that is the price of love. The only way not to grieve is not to love. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn." How is it blessed to mourn, to grieve? You are blessed in your grief because it means you have loved and been loved."

That assurance sustained our family that day and continues to do so today. My father-in-law rests in the arms of a loving, merciful, God of salvation. He has been welcomed into the eternal communion of all the saints in glory, just as we too will be. Gathered with the saints.

That title, saint, 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, or another brother or sister in Christ, "saint" may not 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.

Today is about claiming the fact we will gather with the saints when Christ comes again. But we also claim the fact we are saints – here and now. 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 view stamped across the forehead of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ – even those we may not get along with so well, those who may have hurt us, 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 perhaps this is the common ground in which we need to grasp onto in the church. We are all saints.

With that said, maybe we should give ourselves a big pat on the back. Hip, hip, hooray for us! Indeed we should; but, we also have to be cautious in that we don't make this day simply about us. 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.

We are saints by grace, the grace of Christ. Grace that moves us to see the saint in the other. Grace that moves us to love our enemies. Grace that moves us to pray for those who hurt us. Grace that moves us to do to others as we would have them do unto us. Grace that 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. Be saints, faithful people of God! Amen.