

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

All Saints Day - Year A

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Revelation 7:9-17

Psalm 34:1-10,22

I John 3:1-3

Matthew 5:1-12

11/05/2023

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew:

1When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: 3“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. 5“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. 6“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. 7“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. 8“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 9“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. 10“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

The Gospel of Our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

All the Saints

Good morning! Today we observe All Saints Day. Technically it falls on November 1st, the day after Reformation Day, or as its lesser known holiday, Halloween... It serves two functions: the first, and more central, is to serve as a day in the year to remember the beloved who have died in the last year. But it has also become a day of theological learning for the Lutheran Church. You see, in pop-culture saints have become deeply religious people who seem to make few, if any, mistakes and who wow the world with their humble, faithful, passionate, and patient service to God and God's whole creation. The best of the best, you might say. Now, if you grew up in the Orthodox or Catholic Church, a Saint (capital "S") is a more formal position. These esteemed folks have gone through the official process of being recognized, with requirements like performing three miracles AFTER the person's death. In the Catholic Church there are over 10,000 saints, and they are seen as active participants in God's work.

But here in the Lutheran Church, we look at it a little differently. It's still a confusing puzzle because we celebrate the life of particular Saints when their date comes up on the calendar too. We certainly have less than 10,000 people, but you will find a whole list of names that you will also hear in the Catholic Church. Names like Thomas Aquinas, Polycarp, Patrick, Augustine, and Bishop Oscar Romero. But you'll find a whole list of other names you might not hear in other churches: names like Martin Luther and his wife Katy, or Katherine Von Bora. We also have names like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and one of our more recent additions is the Emmanuel 9. Another difference is that the traditional way to call the specific day the

Saint is honored has been the “feast day” of such and such a Saint. But we use the language of commemoration. It is a way of distancing ourselves from the possibility that we might be worshipping these particular Saints. We celebrate the life they lived through commemoration.

Originally, we looked for a way to celebrate the life of the early church martyrs, but by the 2nd century we had a lot of dead Christians, and not enough days to remember them. That’s when All Saints Day was started. In the 8th century it was moved to the first day of November to put a Christian stamp on a pesky Celtic holiday everyone kept celebrating. I can’t for the life of me think of what that might be...

But, as I said, this day serves another purpose. Raise your hand if you believe in God. Now raise your hand if you were baptized. If you can check those boxes, congratulations! You’re a saint! That’s a very different outlook from what we may have thought. I often think of us as “lowercase” saints and the more famous names as “capital” Saints. Think of it this way, we all may have played football at some point in our life, but not all of us have been made Super Bowl MVPs. Why the difference? Well during the Reformation, that thing we talked about last week, Martin Luther was tired of people thinking that their faith life was somehow inferior to the “pros.” You see, what Luther realized was something a lot of other Christians knew but didn’t seem to always remember. In Scripture, the word always refers to the whole collective of believers. It was a way of saying who we belonged to, Jesus.

Since this way of understanding means that all believers are saints, a common phrase began to be used to explain the dichotomy of this life. They used a fancy Latin phrase, but translated to English we say we are “simultaneously saint and sinner.” This wonderful phrase was a way for

Christians to explain the strange reality that we seem to do both wonderful and horrible things, often at the same time. Pastor Andrew Tucker has a wonderful example, he once said that being a Saint and Sinner is knowing that shopping on Amazon is a practice that often hurts small businesses and leads to predatory practices by large corporations, and yet still making the decision to buy stuff on Prime Day. Rolf Jacobson, in his book “Crazy Talk: A No-So-Stuffly Dictionary of Theological Terms” says this: *“Paul wrote in Romans 7 that no matter how much he wants to, he can’t do good stuff; conversely, no matter how much he hates being a jerk, he still is. Paul knows that in spite of the good the Spirit can do through him, he’s still a slave to sin. That goes for all Christians. And yet all Christians are simultaneously saints because God has established a relationship with the sinner. That is what’s different about a Christian— the relationship that God initiates with us. It means we can admit we are sinners. It means that we can try to love our neighbor. And it means that God considers us Holy Saints, even though we are still sinners, too.”*¹

Which brings us to our selection of Scripture in today’s readings. They help highlight the celebration of life for those that we lost, those saints who have gone before us, and at the same time help us see the hallmarks of a life lived as a saint. We don’t get it perfect, heck no, but we try. All the while marveling at the glory of God, just as John said: *“¹See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like*

¹ Jacobson, Rolf A., ed. *Crazy Talk: A Not-so-Stuffly Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Books, 2008. p. 160.

him, for we will see him as he is. 3And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.”² So saints of God, never give up. Amen.

² I John 3:1-3 NRSV