

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who sits at the right hand of the father our Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Let us pray: Dear Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for all your saints throughout the ages. For those who passed on your word from ancient times to the present. Through the preaching and teaching of your Word and by the power of your Holy Spirit, inspire us and give us the courage to witness to the Gospel through our own lives, so your Word would continue to form and nurture faith for generations to come. This we ask in Christ's holy name. Amen.

All Saints Sunday gives us the opportunity to focus on the lives and contributions of those members of our congregation who have joined the church triumphant during the past year as well as all our loved ones throughout our lifetimes who shaped us and passed on their faith to us. It is certainly appropriate for the church to pause and honor all the saints, both great and small. This morning, we'll focus on the broader significance of this day for the ongoing life of the church. In particular, the significance of the saints to the worship life of the church today.

I consider it an honor and a privilege to be able to lead this congregation in the ancient liturgy of the Lutheran tradition. I've attended other churches where the emphasis was on flashy entertainment with little emphasis paid to the ages old

liturgical content. I know many people will say to me that for the church to grow we have to do more contemporary music and spend less time repeating the same old words week after week. For me, I can't imagine not going through all those ancient words on Sunday morning. The canticles we sing, the words we read from holy scripture, and the ancient prayers we pray have been handed down to us by faithful Christians, many of whom paid a heavy sacrifice for their witness to the Gospel. I believe these ancient words are capable of accomplishing great things even miraculous things.

When I was in my second year of my seminary time, I did my clinical Pastoral work at the Dayton Veterans Hospital. As part of my rotation through the many facets of the Dayton VA I had the honor of leading worship for the veterans on the locked down Alzheimer's unit. I wasn't sure how I was going to make worship happen with these men and my fears grew worse when I got to the unit and met the men on that floor. Most of them couldn't remember how to even dress themselves. One man had his zipper down and his shirt sticking out of his zipper. Another couldn't remember how to fasten his belt. On the Sundays when I was with them there wasn't a single visitor present. Their family and friends probably gave up visiting long ago due to the lack of the patient's ability to make conversation or to even remember who the visitor was. That's especially hard on the spouses and children... As we started our worship I was surprised when they

all sang along with our piano player singing a very familiar hymn, which I've long since forgotten. These gentlemen, who couldn't remember how to dress themselves or their closest next of kin, sang all the hymns we had planned for those Sundays. Even more surprising, they could also recite the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles Creed. Even in the darkness of lost memory, they had miraculous recall of the ancient words of their worship service which they had read and recited so many times throughout their lives. I'm not saying our Lutheran Liturgy is the cure for Alzheimer's disease or other dementia problems, but those ancient words do give us something to cling to when everything else quite literally slips through our fingers. I've always enjoyed our Lutheran traditional worship settings, but after my experience seeing the effect it had on folks in the throws of dementia, I fell in love with our traditional Lutheran Worship settings.

On occasion, I don't mind following a different form of worship, as we do for our outdoor worship, the woman's Thank-offering service, the Children's Christmas Program, and a few other times during the year, but I still believe, even in these services God uses our participation in worshiping Him to inspire, form, and grow our faith and trust in Jesus Christ and His promises. The words of the saints, as recorded in the Scriptures, as written and sung in songs, or spoken in ancient creeds and prayers still carry the weight of our baggage we bring with us to

this service. We can't afford to ignore the value of all the saints from ages past including all the saints right up to the loved ones we mourn and grieve for today.

Over the years I've attended many so called contemporary worship services. Most of them abandon the great hymns of the past in favor of music designed to entertain rather than participate in. Not all, but many of the songs are repetitious and contain superficial theology at best and confused theology at their worse. I will admit the tunes of many of these contemporary songs are very catchy. If you let yourself, pretty soon you'll have your hands in the air, a huge smile on your face. Every book I've read on Church growth says Growing churches use large power-point projectors and well-orchestrated productions of popular music, designed to uplift the hearts of the "audience" to some vague spirituality. In many instances, these modern services don't even include the reading of the assigned lessons for the day. At one church where I attended a funeral this past year, there wasn't even a Cross in the Sanctuary... I have to ask, what are we missing if we abandon the message of the saints of old?

The time when we gather as God's people is a time when God's presence refreshes us, but also does so much more. In case you haven't discovered this undeniable truth. being a Christian doesn't turn your life into a happily ever after fairy tale in technicolor and surround sound. You know what? There's people out there today who just found out their cancer isn't responding to treatment, or who

their kids are out of control and failing in school, or their marriage is on the rocks.

I'm so thankful when I come to worship that God takes on my burden and the weight of life's troubles are lifted, even if just for a while, and I'm free to praise and serve God. The truth is, the saints of centuries past do have something to say to us today. They have walked the path of life we are walking, some of them under persecution and duress, yet they walked their path in faith, trusting the promises of Jesus Christ. Some of them gave their lives in order to proclaim their trust in those promises. They trusted in the message of God, handed down by the saints before them. They trusted in Jesus Christ and received redemption and hope for the future. As Christians, our hope is built on trusting the witness of those ancient saints who walked the path of faith long ago.

So, let's look at our Gospel lesson for this morning. Luke tells us Jesus pronounced four blessings on the people who had come to faith in him. Please remember, these are blessings, not commands. Jesus isn't saying this is the way we need to live our lives of faith, but that God truly cares about those who experience the troubles of life. Jesus says, blessed are the poor. To them, He gives hope in the promise they will inherit the kingdom of God. He then calls on us, his modern disciples to assist helping alleviate their situation. Jesus says, "Blessed are the hungry now, for you will be filled." Here Jesus offers to those who are hungry, a message of hope, and calls on us, as his disciples to feed them. Again, Jesus

says, “Blessed are those who weep now, for they will laugh.” I’ve seen and heard the weeping of many faithful Christians and some who had no faith. In every case, I wanted to “fix it” for them. I’ve come to realize I can’t fix their grief. God, through the message of his saints, and this message of Jesus, tells us those who hurt now, will ultimately laugh and find new life because of the hope they have in God’s redeeming grace. Finally, Jesus says, “Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you because of your belief in him.” The time is coming when we will all leap for joy, when we will all sing new and great hymns of praise in his very presence (and like it!). The message of the saints is the message we all need to hear. It’s a message centered on joy and love, even when people may be hurting. The message of the saints is real. It’s a message born of frustrations, agonies, and the pains of living life in a broken and sinful world. It’s a message that always offers the hope of the Gospel, the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.

So, may we, in our contemporary society, continue to worship God, by immersing ourselves in the lives of all of God’s saints, both those who have died long ago, and those who continue to spread his redeeming Grace today and tomorrow. The message of the saints is timeless. May we be faithful in passing their faith down for generations to come. Thanks be to God for All the Saints, Amen.