

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Lena, IL – 6 November 2022**  
**All Saints Sunday - Year C**

**1st Reading: *Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18***

**Psalm: 149**

**2nd Reading: *Ephesians 1:11-23***

**Gospel: *Luke 6:20-31***

**Sermon - Vicar Thomas J. Mosbø**

In the name of the Father, ✚ and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is All Saints Sunday, a day to remember and commemorate all of the saints. We have special days throughout the year to remember specific saints, especially those in the New Testament, but today we celebrate all of the saints, known and unknown.

But wait a minute. Just who do we mean when we say “the saints”? What is it that makes a saint a saint? The word “saint” simply means someone who is holy, but what makes someone holy?

I think we tend to imagine that saints are those who have become holy by attaining a level of moral perfection. We may say that someone has “the patience of a saint”, because we suppose that saints have achieved a state of perfect serenity - they do not worry, they aren’t anxious, they never become frustrated or depressed.

But when we take a close look at any of the real saints, we discover that this is not the case. They are not sinless, they do make mistakes. Of course, all the saints *have* tried to live the best lives that they could, and Jesus inspires all of us in the Gospel today to live as perfectly as possible, and especially to follow the Golden Rule: “Do to others as you would have them do to you”. But the saints we admire and remember have not *necessarily* become completely perfect through their endeavours.

So let’s back up a bit. To see what makes a person holy, let’s ask what makes anything holy. Let’s look at our church. Is it the most perfect building ever built? Is the wood the pews and the altar have been made from the best wood in the world? Of course, when it was built, the builders used the best materials they could find, and did their best to create a space that would enhance our worship, but it is not the quality of the wood or the carpeting or the windows that make it a holy space.

It is really very simple. This church is a holy place because it has been set apart and dedicated to God as a place of worship. The bread and wine we will eat and drink at communion are not necessarily the best bread or the best wine in the world, but they are holy because we will consecrate them through the words of Jesus so that when we eat this particular bread and this particular wine we will be partaking of Jesus' own body and blood.

It is dedicated, set apart, for a holy use, and because of this it becomes holy itself. So it is the same for the saints. What makes them holy is that they have been dedicated, set apart from others in the world, to live for God. And what was done to set them apart? This again is very simple, they were baptised into the name of Jesus, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. And we have also been baptised, so yes, we, too, are all saints.

When we read Paul's letters or the Revelation to John, we find that they are addressed to "all the saints" in such-and-such a location, meaning all the Christians there. In this morning's letter, to the Ephesians, Paul writes about their "love toward all the saints", meaning their love for each other, for all those baptised as Christians.

And yet Paul often goes on to scold those same saints for not living as they should, because as saints they should try to live the best lives that they can. So what we remember especially about those saints whom we honour most is not really their moral perfection, but their dedication to God and to Christ. They are often "heroes of the faith" who have made a difference in the lives of others and who have proclaimed the Gospel of Christ in words or in actions.

In keeping with this, we Lutherans have tended to remember on All Saints Day, not so much the greatest heroes of the faith, whom we celebrate on their own special days, but the little heroes of the faith, who are near and dear to each of us personally - parents, godparents, brothers and sisters - and we especially remember those who have been a part of our congregation but have now "fallen asleep", awaiting the Resurrection.

It is good to do this, and it is good to remember them with tears, because we do miss them and they are no longer physically part of our lives. Even Jesus, in the Gospel of John, wept at the death of his friend Lazarus, even though he knew he was about to raise Lazarus up from the dead.

But it is also good to remember that because these saints whom we have known personally are with the Lord, awaiting the final Resurrection, they are still with us in our spirits and in our hearts. And as we eat and drink the body and blood of Christ in communion today, we do it not only with each other here in this church, but with all the saints of every time and every place, and with those we remember in our hearts.

One of the most amazing things when we lived in England was to worship in a place like Durham Cathedral, not because it was grand and magnificent, but because we realised that we were worshipping together with all those who had worshipped in that same building and had received communion there for 900 years, and not only with those from the past, but also with all those yet to come.

The history of Good Shepherd Lutheran does not go back quite that far, but we *are* here today receiving communion along with all those who have worshipped here for several generations, and along with all those who will worship here in the future.

And when we receive communion, we also look together to the ultimate future, and we say that this is a foretaste of the feast to come, the feast of victory for our God, when we will again feast together with all those who have gone before us who will join us in the resurrection. In all of our readings today there is a mention of our future hope of living forever in the Kingdom of God with all the saints.

In Daniel we read that “the holy ones [that is, the saints] of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever—forever and ever.” And Paul tells us that “In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance... not only in this age but also in the age to come.” And Jesus, of course tells us:

“Blessed are you who are poor,  
for yours is the kingdom of God.

<sup>21</sup>“Blessed are you who are hungry now,  
for you will be filled.

“Blessed are you who weep now,  
for you will laugh.

<sup>22</sup>“Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you,  
revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. <sup>23</sup>Rejoice in that  
day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven.”

All of the saints we remember today - great saints like John the beloved disciple or Francis of Assisi, and simple saints, like our own parents and grandparents, and those who have fallen asleep this past year who we commemorate especially today - have received the reward of eternal life through their faith in Jesus, the Son of God - and they await with us the coming of Jesus and his kingdom forever and ever, when all things, and all of us *will* be made perfect forever. So let us follow the example of all the saints, living in faith in Jesus, living in hope of the resurrection, and living in love as those set apart to be holy, doing to others as we would have them do to us.

Amen!