

Worship for November 7, 2021

All Saints Sunday

Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Hebrews 12:1

Prelude

*Call to Worship

Holy God of wind and fire,

dance through our worship today.

Holy God of earthquakes and illness,

share our memories, our tears of sadness and loss.

Holy God of creation and new beginnings,

show us again your vision of healing and wholeness

and the promise of life here and in the world to come.

*Hymn Holy, Holy, Holy

Opening Prayer

Eternal God, you have knit together your people of all times and places into one communion in the mystical body of our Lord Jesus Christ. Grant us your Holy Spirit that we may be encouraged and strengthened, seeking your forgiveness in our moments or seasons of failure, persevering in our part of faith's course, until such time as we join the great cloud of witnesses in our eternal home. Amen.

*Hymn I Sung a Song if the Saints of God

Assurance of Forgiveness

Jesus said, "For the Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."

Friends, believe in the good news of the gospel. Our sins are forgiven. Alleluia! Amen.

First Reading Revelation 21:1-6

Time With Our Young Disciples

New Testament Reading

Matthew 5:1-12

The Morning Message

One of the blessings of being part of a family, and in my case, a large family, is the endless supply of stories. I've learned that, in our case, some stories are true and some are legend. Maybe you've witnessed the same thing in your own family.

In the hopes that I haven't worn you out with them, I'd like to share a true story I believe is appropriate for All Saints Sunday, a day set aside to remember those who have finished their earthly lives and now live with all the saints in the Church Triumphant.

And, in the hearing, I hope you will be assured that your faith and life will be remembered when you have joined them.

My father's last living sibling, his younger sister, died a few Septembers ago. My mother, sister, and I went to the funeral together. It was held at the Baptist church in which my aunt and uncle were long-standing faithful members.

The church is in eastern Kentucky, in a rural setting outside of Louisa. Whenever I visit an unfamiliar church, regardless of the flavor, I'm always a little anxious, a little uncomfortable. But, the people who greeted us were warm and gracious and made us feel welcome. They were comforting us, even while we had come to comfort our family members.

That was the hardest thing about the day: embracing our family members. Feeling their trembling bodies, and hearing their sobs. Being willing to enter into their grief and loss, as they have done for us in our times of sorrow.

I remember the day my aunt and uncle were married. And when he came home from Korea and we met him at the airport. And the arrival of their children and grandchildren, my uncle's baptism at an advanced age in his brother's swimming pool. My aunt's musical ability. She and her sister both sang and played piano for their churches.

The pastor stepped up to the pulpit and everyone took a seat in the bright and comfortable sanctuary. He prayed for God's Spirit to surround us, for comfort and peace to settle upon the family and to strengthen them. He acknowledged the somber nature of the gathering. Then he reminded all of us that our fate is not simply to be born, live a little, and then die. Our lives are much more meaningful and valuable than that. He reminded us of the unmatched love of a God who created the world and all that is in it, including my aunt and all of us. He spoke of Jesus, God's own beloved Son, who lived a sinless life and died for our sins, that we might live. He spoke of my aunt's life, and recalled some of the experiences that had shaped her life. He praised her service to Christ and his church as their pianist for decades. He assured us that she had been received by Jesus into her heavenly home, where there would be a great reunion with those who had gone before her.

And then the pastor asked us to stand and sing a hymn. We did, but, we didn't make much noise. The sanctuary was strangely muted. The piano was silent.

And my first thought was to wonder why hadn't they make arrangements for someone to play for the service. That's number one on my list when planning a funeral. Music is important. Often, people will request particular hymns, everything from the stately "Holy, Holy, Holy" to "Life Is Like a Mountain Railroad." If it is helpful to loved ones, we try to accommodate them.

And, all of a sudden, my eyes filled with tears and the notes were caught in my throat. The piano was silent because the piano player was no longer there. Once she saw in a mirror dimly, but, now, she saw face to face. She was absent from the body and present with the Lord.

It was one of the most profound moments I have ever witnessed in worship, an epiphany within the sermon. I was filled with the competing emotions of grief and joy, and I know I was not alone in this experience.

If you watched the coverage of Colin Powell's funeral, you heard his son's moving words. He spoke of his father sitting beside his hospital bed when he had been in a terrible accident, his father's hand wrapped around his in love and reassurance.

And then of how the roles were reversed at the end of his father's life, when the son sat at the bedside of the father, holding his hand, hoping to convey a message of love and assurance. And he marveled at the meaning of that gesture, holding the hand that had signed report cards, pitched balls, fixed old cars, signed treaties, held his wife's hand in marriage. His father's life had been so rich and full, at home and in public. To be his son or daughter was a gift and a blessing.

Neither you nor I have had such a high profile as Colin Powell. But, your influence, our influence, faith, and life, is just as important. Your sphere of influence is deep and wide, running from the ordinary to the sublime.

And when you have made the journey from earth to heaven, you will be remembered. And you will be missed.

And then the faithful will ask God to inspire us by all within you that was good, and kind, and faithful, that we, too, might live a life worthy of the calling of Christ. May it be so for all of us.

*Hymn

*Affirmation of Faith

The Apostles' Creed p.35

*Gloria Patri

Ordination and Installation to the Office of Ruling Elder
Installation to the Office of Ruling Elder

Clara Adkins
Mary Minichan

Prayers of the Faithful and the Lord's Prayer Romans 6:3-5

This morning we remember family, friends, and loved ones who have joined
the blessed company of the saints in light during this church year.

When we were baptized into Christ Jesus, we were baptized into his death.

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that, as Christ was raised from the
dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life.

For if we have been united with Christ in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in
a resurrection like his.

Eternal God, we bless you for the great company of all those who have kept the faith, finished
their race, and now rest from their labor. We praise you for those whom you have received into
your presence that we name now in our hearts.

We lift our concerns for our community, our nation, and the world, that all may be supplied their
daily needs and know the security of freedom and peace. We pray for those who suffer from
illness and other circumstances. We give you thanks for all gifts of healing and compassion
offered in your name.

Help us to believe where we have not seen, trusting you to lead us through our years.

Bring us at last with all your saints into the joy of your home, through Christ Jesus who taught us
to pray, saying, Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy
will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts
as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is
the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

*Hymn 730 For All the Saints

*Blessing

Go out in the confidence that your lives are safe in God.

Keep your hands clean and your hearts pure.

Do not act falsely or deceitfully.

Trust in the Lord, even in the face of death,
and follow in the footsteps of all God's saints.

And may God keep a protective eye on you;

May Christ Jesus show you his grace and mercy;

And may the Holy Spirit give you a vision of the life of the world made new.

*Postlude