

Worship for November 3, 2024

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 326 For All the Saints

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 Take, O Take Me As I Am

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

Saints Among Us

Who knows who Saint Dymphna is?

That's what I thought. No one. I didn't either until I read an article by Nadia Bolz-Weber, a Lutheran minister.

Nadia says St. Dymphna is her favorite saint. In her, we can clearly see the Beatitudes enacted. Dymphna was the daughter of a pagan Irish king and his Christian wife in the 7th century.

Before her death at the young age of fifteen, Dymphna and some other Christian missionaries founded a home for the anxious and mentally ill in Belgium. Reports were positive about the home. Many who suffered from mental and emotional problems became less afflicted having been cared for in the mission.

Dymphna is officially the patron saint of the anxious, the patron saint of the emotionally disturbed, the patron saint of the mentally ill, and the patron saint of those with neurological disorders.

Nadia Bolz-Weber says that with those things to her credit, Dymphna seems like just her kind of saint. Nadia's history makes quite a story. Suffice it to say, she has waged her own mental, emotional and spiritual battles. She suffered from debilitating drug addiction and it seemed she was headed for certain destruction and an early death. But God had other plans and so she clings to the faith of Dymphna, with whom she identifies.

But today we celebrate All Saints, not just some saints, most of whom will never have a prayer card made with their likeness on it or their name carved on the front of a church.

We Presbyterians do not ascribe to the belief that we need special people to intercede for us as if God listens to them more than God listens to us because they are advance placement Christians or something. What we celebrate today is not the superhuman faith and powers of a select few but rather God's ability to use flawed people to do divine things.

We celebrate all on whom God has acted in baptism, sealing them, as Ephesians says, with the mark of the Holy Spirit. We celebrate that God engenders faith within us, and through ordinary acts of love, the Kingdom of Heaven moves closer to earth.

We celebrate the great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us, and that the faithful departed are as much a part of the body of Christ as we are.

We are connected to so much faith; so many witnesses; so much courage and sacrifice and adventure and daring and so much trust and so much divine love it is overwhelming.

In this turbulent age, when we are always looking for “our” people, we desperately need to hang onto this fact: what connects us in a real and lasting way is not Facebook, or what school we graduated from, what we do in our leisure time, what political party we belong to, or anything other than this truth. We have membership in the body of Christ, the Church with a capital “C.”

And even more importantly, what connects us isn’t so much our beliefs about God, or our theology, or our doctrinal positions. No. It’s God and God gathers up all of God’s children into the Church eternal. We are all sinners saved by grace to glorify God and enjoy God forever.

So, today, for a little while, let’s remember all the deeply faithful saints through whom the glory of God has been revealed and will be revealed as year succeeds to year.

Yesterday dawned bright and sunny, the temperature mild for a November day. Ed suggested we go to the Marshall game and so we did. You all know this—you can’t be anonymous in Huntington, West Virginia. As soon as we found our seats, a couple we’ve known for over forty years sat right in front of us. We chatted for a few minutes, catching up. Then one of them said we were sitting in special seats. The whole row of seats had been occupied for years by a group of church folks who call themselves the Pea Ridge Bible Study. Meeting on Thursday nights for at least forty years. Many of them community leaders, government office holders, teachers and principals, volunteer leaders who guided major charitable organizations like Habitat for Humanity and the Boys and Girls Clubs. They were good and faithful people who worked to make their part of the world shine. They were cheerleaders for hope and optimism. Blessed are the cheerleaders. Most of them are in heaven now. Saints for sure, although they began that service while still on terra firma.

The election is Tuesday. It makes me anxious. We’ve heard the pitches, the speeches, the commercials. I dread each day’s coverage. Why can’t they stay on the high road? Nothing is sacred. Nothing is too vile or vulgar.

People speak or write in the most provocative and strident ways possible. Every situation is somehow seen as the most consequential event in history. We demonize those who disagree with us and sever relationships. Reasonable thinkers know this further divides a conflicted public, but reason is often in short supply.

But, we’re experienced enough to know that regardless of the outcome of the election, life will go on. When I doubt that or think that I just don’t have the energy to adapt, change, or cope, I am reminded of the Sunday many years ago, two days before the Presidential election, when I wished I were anywhere other than behind the pulpit. As usual, the Presbyterians were plugged into politics and tension was high.

As the prelude began, into the sanctuary marched a woman proudly wearing a John Kerry t-shirt. She sat in her usual place-right up front on the left side.

Simultaneously, another woman marched in to take her place on the right side of the sanctuary wearing a red, white, and blue rhinestone pin that said, "Bush."

And because I always think the worst thing will happen, I prayed my most strident prayer, "Help!"

And help came.

The two women walked out of the sanctuary together, fussing at each other a little, their very distinct voices rising above the others. They each got cake and coffee during the fellowship time. They sat together, still sparring. Sometime later, I saw them walking out of the church, each with an arm around the other. I think it was their testimony that what binds us together is greater than anything that could divide us.

When I am sick and tired of the ugliness in life, and especially in campaigns, I recall that morning. Both of these women are in heaven now, even though they deviled each other in this life. Saints.

Saint Dymphna was a very young girl when her mother died. Her father was inconsolable. His courtiers decided what he needed was a new wife. But no woman in his kingdom pleased the king. Eventually, someone dared to suggest the unthinkable: the king should marry his daughter.

Terrified at the prospect, Dymphna fled with some others to Belgium where she established her mission, a home for the mentally and emotionally challenged. She was suffering great anxiety and found meaning in helping others.

Unfortunately, Dymphna died at fifteen by her father's hand. That's another way people become saints-through martyrdom, to give one's life for one's faith.

People of faith still find themselves in life-threatening situations. And some indeed give their lives for the cause of Christ. But, thanks be to God, death is not the final word.

In 1985, as a sign of shared faith and purpose, the General Assembly of the newly re-united Presbyterian Church, adopted the *Declaration of Faith*. This was a welcome and celebrated accomplishment, as the church worked to heal the split that had deeply divided north from south for over one hundred years.

Many scoffed at the idea of re-union, declaring the church irreparably fractured, as good as dead. I would go as far as to say some preferred death to forming a relationship with those they considered infidels.

But, the church is the body of Christ and he is very much alive.

In part, the Declaration states:

“In the death of Jesus Christ, God’s way in the world seemed finally defeated.

But death was no match for God.

The resurrection of Jesus was God’s victory over death.

Death often seems to prove that life is not worth living, that our best efforts and deepest affections go for nothing.

We do not yet see the end of death.

But Christ has been raised from the dead,

Transformed, and yet the same person.

In his resurrection is the promise of ours.

We are convinced the life God wills for each of us is stronger than the death that destroys us.

The glory of that life exceeds our imagination,

but we know we shall be with Christ.

So we treat death as a broken power.

Its ultimate defeat is certain.

In the face of death we grieve.

Yet in hope we celebrate life.

No life ends so tragically that its meaning and value are destroyed.

Nothing, not even death, can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Jesus is Lord!

He has been Lord from the beginning.

He will be Lord at the end.

Even now he is Lord.”

Glory be to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

*Hymn 37 Let All Things Now Living

*Affirmation of Faith The Apostles’ Creed p.35

*Hymn 581 Gloria Patri

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 unto 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.

Members of Kuhn Memorial received into the Church Triumphant this year:

Sue Yoak

Other recently departed loved ones and those who have inspired our faith:

Alice Bias

Ben Klusty

Paul Adkins

Marsha Wilson

Jake Sharp

Tyler Blankenship

Braxton McComas

Brody Reynolds

Linda Reid

Jimmy Edmunds

Alice Harold

Dove Vititoe

John and Mattie Morgan

Joy Morgan

George and Lula Wilson

Stan Napier

Jean and John Porterfield

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 closest to us whom you have received into your presence... and others 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, safety, and peace. We pray for those who suffer from illness and other circumstances which prevent them from living whole and blessed lives.

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... Amen.

Presenting Our Gifts of Tithe and Offering

Offertory

*Hymn 607 Doxology

*Prayer of Dedication

*Hymn 730 I Sing a Song of the Saints of God

*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