

Sermons at  
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)  
Reggie Denton, Pastor

November 3, 2019 (All Saints Sunday, Year C)  
Ephesians 1:11-23  
Luke 6:20-31

Who are you? Where do you come from? What makes you who you are?

We'd like to think that life is just about us, about what we think, and what we want, but in truth, without those who've gone before us, we're nothing. The way we look, what we like and don't like, what we like to do, the KIND of people we like to spend time with, it has ALL been INFLUENCED by our parents, and grandparents, and great-grandparents.

This town was built by people before us, this state was settled by people before us, our way of life in this country, our FREEDOM, was WON and DEFENDED by people before us. Someone once said that we're standing on the shoulders of giants. Everything that we have, and everything that we ARE, has been either influenced or GIVEN to us by others. It's our INHERITANCE.

Who are WE to give up what's been passed down to us? We must not LET ourselves FORGET about our loved ones, and the inheritance they've given to us. REMEMBERING is what MAKES us who we ARE.

And remembering is what this All Saints' Sunday is about. This is the day of the church year when we remember the saints, all the baptized who have finished their course by faith, and now rest from their labors. This morning we'll remember by name some of those most dear to us, who have gone on ahead to their great reward. We do this not because we worship or venerate our deceased loved ones, but because their LIVES POINT us to God. Their example shows us the way, and their MEMORY CONTINUES to lead us on that path. This is the day that we take seriously the words we say in the Apostles' Creed: We "believe in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

We remember those who've gone before us, because their lives helped SHAPE OUR lives. They're a part of us. Their personality, their smile, their laugh, their hurts, and their FAITH are a part of US now. It's our inheritance. If we FORGET them, we LOSE a part of OURSELVES.

In many European countries on All Saints' Day, cemeteries are filled with lit candles placed in front of every gravestone. On that night, people go to cemeteries to soak up the light and to be reminded that we are SURROUNDED by the light of those who have gone BEFORE us. The light of those flickering candles represents the STORIES of life and death that have touched OUR lives. The FLICKERING lights are signs of our aching hearts and our tears.

I believe that it's in THIS light, storied and ILLUMINATING light, that "the eyes of (our hearts)" are opened. It's such a strange expression that St. Paul uses there, "they eyes of your heart," but there's a poetic beauty to it. In the LIGHT of the communion of saints, in the light of the memories and presence of our loved ones, the eyes of our HEARTS can see so much MORE than our OUTWARD eyes. Paul writes, "With the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints..."

Christ has given us an INHERITANCE, passed on to us through our loved ones. Faith, redemption, hope—THIS is our inheritance.

Paul adds, "In him, you also... were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the PLEDGE of our inheritance...as God's own people." He's talking of course about baptism. When we're baptized, we're adopted as God's children. We're UNITED to the saints of every time and every place. They become our brothers and sisters. And the joy, and the love, and the peace, that they ALREADY know, becomes OUR INHERITANCE.

As I look out at all of you, I SEE the saints of God. You may not FEEL like much of a saint, but it's not ABOUT what WE think. GOD'S opinion is the ONLY one that matters. And GOD'S mind is made up. You are a CHILD of God, MADE so in baptism.

Consider whom JESUS CALLS saints: "Blessed are you who are poor.... Blessed are you who are hungry.... Blessed are you who weep.... Blessed are you when people hate you... on account of the Son of Man." Not the people you would EXPECT to be blessed. Not the ones who LOOK blessed. But WE don't get to decide; GOD decides who the REAL saints are.

That's your inheritance. You don't RECEIVE an inheritance because of anything you DO, but simply because you ARE someone's child, and you are PRECIOUS to them. You are a child of GOD, and God wants to give you All that he has.

All Saints' Day gives us an opportunity to think about OUR legacy. What are you going to pass on to the ones YOU love? Your kindness, your gentle spirit, your generous heart, your abiding faith? You are the SAINTS of God. And those QUALITIES are your LEGACY. ~~And this PLACE is OUR legacy.~~

Together, on this All Saints' Sunday, in the memory and presence of those who have gone before you, in the promise of those who follow you, and in the hope of the faith we share, DEAR SAINTS, LIVE for the PRAISE of his glory.

Let us pray. O God, we give you thanks for ALL the saints – the great, the NOT so great, the courageous, the faithful, the bold ones, and EVEN the timid ones, who loved you each in their own time and place and way, showing US the way to eternal life. May WE show others. Amen.

And amen.