



GPS GUIDE: NOVEMBER 7, 2021

Grow. Pray. Study

All Saints Sunday

Sermon: Seeing the Saints

Hebrews 12: 1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.

Monday: Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

On the first Sunday in November, the church remembers those who have come full circle in Christ. We remember the saints, those whose lives speak God's love so eloquently and powerfully the reverberations still echo through our lives. The church sets aside All Saints Day to tell their stories, to honor their memories, and to hold up their example as a road map for life's journey. "Saint" means different things to different people, but to Paul a saint is essentially anyone who is part of the Body of Christ. That is why, in some traditions, All Saints is a day to celebrate Holy Baptism, a time to introduce the new Saints to the old ones. Barbara Brown Taylor puts it like this: "The reality is that all of us who have been baptized are already saints... because all it takes to be a saint is to belong to God... it is simply a matter of joining up with the body of Christ... Once you have linked up with Christ's body, once you have been baptized in his name you have everything you need to be a saint. You have your identity, your halo, and a choice: *to live as who you are... or not.*" What can you do this week to more fully claim your identity as one of God's saints?

Prayer: Eternal God, remind me of who I am and who you call me to be. Amen.

Tuesday: Read Revelation 7:9-17

In today's reading John invites us to look behind the curtain, to see what he sees. It's a powerful vision, all the more powerful because it doesn't jibe with some of our popular notions of heaven. You'll notice no one was lounging around on a cloud, gently strumming a golden harp, everyone on what seems to be a permanent vacation. Here, heaven isn't filled with cherubim and seraphim, but with those who have been through the great ordeal and come out on the other side. The saints, in other words. Those who lived lives of faith and paid the price for it. In John's time the price was high. Christians were persecuted and gave their lives rather than bow before Caesar. Most of us haven't known any martyrs, but it's hard to think of a saint without considering what they gave up for their love of God and humanity. Think of Mother Teresa living in and among the poverty of Calcutta. Think of Desmond Tutu watching his country unravel at the seams. Think of Albert Schweitzer building hospitals in Africa. But even more think about those women and men whose names most people don't know, those who simply lived simply, who traded ambition for compassion, greed for generosity, despair for hope. Who have been the saints in your life who showed you what God's love is like?

Prayer: Loving God, help me to follow the examples of the everyday saints who have been part of my life. Amen.

Wednesday: Read Matthew 5:1-12

In the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is addressing the disciples. A crowd gathers as he preaches, but in the beginning, Jesus is speaking directly to his followers. Not *to* the crowd, but *about* the crowd. And Jesus tells the disciples to remember—you are here for THEM. You are blessed inasmuch as you share God's blessing with them. God loves most the ones the world would throw away, and the ones who stand alongside them. This is what Jesus wants his followers to know first; this is where Jesus starts – not with ethical requirements, not with law, but with grace. Before teaching and preaching the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus pronounces God's grace. Before healing anyone, before confronting the Pharisees, before eating with sinners and tax collectors, before performing miracles, before cleansing the temple, before dying on a cross, before resurrection, before everything Jesus affirms God's grace. And this is not so much a message for the meek the poor in spirit, those who are mourning, at least not directly. It's a message for us, for Jesus' followers, for the church, for you and me. And the message is crystal clear: we begin with grace. Who have you known who embodied God's grace? What have you learned from watching them?

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, help me to share with others the grace I have found in you. Amen.

Thursday: Read Revelation 21:1-6

In Revelation 21, people do not go to heaven as most people have been taught but rather God comes down to earth to dwell with mortals — “the new

Jerusalem descends from heaven,” and God makes a home among mortals (v.2-3). There is no prediction about the end times, no rapture and no punishment but God comes to be the home of humanity. Theologically, chapter 21 claims a new creation, a home like no other. The poignancy of this text is that the new creation is framed by God's direct speech, “See, I am making all things new.” God's new creation replaces this broken, fragmented, painful world. This new heaven and new earth is a divine world and it is a vision in which the Dream of God is made manifest to God's people. And so, Christians are not called to escape into this new world but rather to partner with God in ways that will allow the love and power of God to be experienced in this world. That is the reason why God comes down into the world to dwell with people. In other words, Revelation claims that this New Jerusalem begins in the present moment and every human being must experience its joy and goodness in the here and now. Thus, the dream of God, also shared by Isaiah 65:17-25, is not an eternal world but must be realized in human history. It is a world where zip codes do not divide people but one where all God's people can experience joy and grace and wholeness. Thus, a new world order for authentic humanity will come about when human beings—particularly the church—is involved in this new creation. How can we as a church participate in God “making all things new?” We pray for God's kingdom to come here and now, but how can we actively work to make that prayer a reality? What can we do as individuals? As a community of faith? As part of a larger movement of Disciples of Christ?

Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Friday: Read Matthew 7:13-27

Here in the last verses of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus isn't talking about hell or eternal punishment or divine judgment instead he's simply telling the truth. Jesus tells the truth: there is a path that leads to life, and there is one that leads to destruction... and the one that leads to life is a lot harder, so you better be careful, and you better pay attention. Jesus tells the truth: there is some awfully bad fruit out there, passing itself off as God's word. Jesus tells us the difficult truth: that there is a way to live—a way to build a life—that is *not* going to stand up to the storms of life, storms that eventually come for all of us. But there is also a way to live, a way to love, a way to act, that leads to **life**. This is a more difficult path, one that is hard (so, so hard) but it's worth it. Go this way and you can build a life that will stand up to any storm. As we remember the saints this week, we remember that these are not just words. This week we remember the ones who took the narrow gate, the hard road, the ones whose lives produced such wonderful fruit. We remember those who didn't just hear Jesus' words, but acted on them. What have you learned from their example? How can you put it into practice in your life?

Prayer: Gracious God, show me the way that leads to you. Amen.

Saturday: Read Hebrews 11:29-12:2

You are invited to light a candle or sit quietly in prayer as you remember those “witnesses” who shared God’s love with you.

Prayer: Holy God, even now the race is set before us. You are calling us into a future that is unknown and uncertain. But we will persevere, because those who came before us loved us enough to tell us what they had learned of your love and redemption, and their lives tell us still. So, for all the saints of Christ’s church whose extraordinary lives astound us, and for all the saints whose ordinary lives glow with the unmistakable light of grace, we give you thanks O God. May our lives honor them, and you. Amen.