

Sermon on Ephesians 1:11-23, Luke 6:20-31
All Saints Sunday, Nov. 3, 2019
Lutheran Church of the Redeemer
By James Erlandson

The letter to the Ephesians begins like this: From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and all the faithful in Christ Jesus: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing, just as God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. For God destined you and me for adoption as God's children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved Jesus Christ. For in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses and sins, according to the riches of his grace that he has lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight God has made known to us the mystery of his will, that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things on heaven and on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance...so that we, who set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of God's glory.*

I think it is helpful today, as we gather on this Feast of All Saints, to see ourselves in the context of our place in time in this vast universe, finite creatures in God's creation, but each given redemption, blessing and an inheritance from God. So today, Redeemer friends, we receive this blessing from God through the apostle Paul, in all humility over 2000 years later, as Paul continues in this epistle lesson read today in our worship, saying: *I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which God has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when God raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the*

age to come...and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” A bold claim to make when the Church was in its infancy, just a few dozen congregations in the world!

I believe that this may be the ideal scripture passage to hear on this Feast of All Saints, which is a day to remember our mortality as human beings, as remember our own loved ones who have died – both faith ancestors long ago and more recently in the past year. Today is like a “funeral service” for the whole Church, when we remember our dead and hear the promise of scripture of God’s mercy, forgiveness of sins, and life everlasting. People around the world, from Mexico’s *Day of the Dead* to Sweden, Germany and other European nations observing All Soul’s Day, light candles and sweep the graves of their loved ones, remembering their faith and their failings, and what lives on in us as their legacy of faith, hope and love.

Today we remember our own loved ones in worship, as churches are doing all over the world. You can see their names listed on the page “Remembrance of the Saints. Only one of our members of Redeemer died – our sister in faith, Jean Trestven, just shortly after All Saints Sunday in 2018. Her death came unexpectedly after a short, but serious illness – in fact, she had helped serve food at the picnic for Dale Street residents on God’s Work, Our Hands Sunday last September. It is fitting that this be one of our lasting memories of Jean, as she was one of those pictured on the service sheet cover photo this past September 8th. For she was participating in one of those expressions of “faith in the Lord Jesus and love toward all the saints” that we have at Redeemer, shown in our hospitality.

We also remember today scores of other loved ones, parents, friends, siblings, neighbors, and those other witnesses of faith who have had a profound effect in our lives. You may not recognize all the names, as they were brought forward by other Redeemer folk, like Lieng Chao Tann, my father-in-law and Kim’s father. I submitted the name of Harry Flynn, formerly archbishop of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul, who recently died. He preached and blessed our altar on the week of prayer for Christian unity when he first arrived in St. Paul – he became a personal friend of mine and he also made a contribution to our roof fund back in the year 2000! I also submitted the name of Bobby Murphy, a church musician who often played the organ and performed here at Redeemer, who died of cancer in January. My college friend Katherine Skibbe died unexpectedly last month. Renee Nunn lost her mother, Betty Gordon, whom we remember today. Reverend Duane Geary died most recently October 18 – he grew up in this neighborhood, was ordained a pastor here at Redeemer in 1966, and served Lutheran churches in other states – he was buried this past Friday at King of Kings Lutheran in Roseville. The list goes on – we invite you to hear their stories and others lifted up downstairs in the church undercroft after worship. But there are

many more whom you may continue to grieve today, perhaps years after their death, as their memory lives on in you, in their words. Perhaps a hymn reminds you of them, or the aroma of a certain food that they cooked, or you remember them at certain holidays of the year. This is one of those church holy days that is cosmic in scope, that is about life and death, the power of God and the promises of scripture, but it is also personal for each one of us, because of those loved ones we have lost. It is probably our most emotional holiday, as we remember our recent dead. But is also a powerful day for healing, as we hear the promises for every one of God's children in baptism – for each one of us – and as the Church together we remember all who have died and the promise to all the faithful of life everlasting. No longer individuals, we are all part of one great body of Christ, the Church.

And so Paul continues to tell the people of the Church in Ephesus (which he had founded), this great promise of God: *You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air....all of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh...children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what God has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.*

This is the promise that has been given to you today, and for the whole Church on earth, to all the faithful living in the mercy of Christ Jesus! The Feast of All Saints is not only for the dead, although we do remember those who have died, and hear the promise of everlasting life for us all. This feast is also for all living saints and sinners, for the term “saints of God” refers also to all the baptized, living and dead – not only those who are examples of righteous living. This is our day, for the whole Church, the whole Body of Christ, living and dead, sinner and saint together, all who have eyes to see and ears to hear God's promises in Christ Jesus. For by God's grace you and I have been saved by Jesus Christ's gift of love, by his death and his resurrection, and by faith we have hope for life today and for the life to come. Thanks be to God for this grace in which we stand, for the faith, hope, and love with which we are filled by the Holy Spirit. Remember that you belong to Christ, in whom you have been baptized! Alleluia!

We believe that in baptism our gracious heavenly Father frees us from sin and death by joining us to the death and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. In Christian funerals, we remember that *when we were baptized in 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 him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

So as we pray when we are baptized, let the light of Christ so shine before others, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. May the Holy Spirit fill you with the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in God's presence, both now and forever. Amen!