

All Saints – Year C – November 2, 2025

Ephesians 1:11-23

Psalms 149

Luke 6:20-31

All Saints: A Very Thin Place

*A sermon preached by The Rev. Dianne Andrews at
St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Bainbridge Island, WA.*

The saints are with us and we are with them. On this Sunday, we come together to celebrate the feast of All Saints during which we remember those who have gone before... and celebrate the connections of love that endure across the veil of death. Today that veil is very thin. The liturgical color for All Saints is white, a symbol of victory and the triumph of life. Traditionally, All Saints is the second of a three-day Hallowtide that begins with All-Hallows Eve that we know as Halloween, observed on October 31. The Feast of All Saints falls on November 1. Initially, All Saints was a day on which the early church recognized and celebrated martyrs, those who had given their lives for the faith... saints who were deemed to be very close to God. November 2, the third day of Hallowtide, is the Feast of All Souls, a day on which we celebrate all the faithful departed, as contrasted with a focus only on church martyrs. In our Episcopal tradition, All Saints and All Souls has essentially been conflated into one holiday. Even though the Feast of All Saints fell on a Saturday this year, we are free to move the observance to Sunday.

A colorful tradition of our Mexican friends is the celebration of a multi-day holiday known as Dia de los Muertos... “Day of the Dead.” During this observance, families go to cemeteries to visit the graves of loved ones where they light candles and enjoy a picnic. It is a time to invite the dead to awaken and join the living... if but for a brief time. Dia de los Muertos is not a time of sadness but rather of celebration and reunion... for in the Mexican culture, death is viewed as part of the natural cycle of life. Mexican folk art is rich with colorful skulls and skeletons that offer an invitation to “dance with death.” In all, these autumn holy days encourage us to remember our roots, our connections, and God’s great gift of love that cannot be vanquished by death.

At the time of my first All Saints sermon in a new parish, back in 2013, I had been hard at work unpacking and settling into my new home. The process of opening boxes and unwrapping possessions was a bit like excavating my life history, especially because my belongings had been in storage for several years. There were many notable artifacts... a multitude of photographs of holidays, vacations, family gatherings, and of fun times with friends. I also discovered that wonky school photo of me with missing front teeth, funny cat eye glasses, and lopsided bangs featuring my four cowlicks, two on each side. That photo is a notorious family favorite. I unwrapped long forgotten souvenirs... and family heirlooms. One wonderful and deeply poignant surprise came when I discovered an answering machine that I had not used in many years. Even though I had replaced it with a newer model, I had kept the old one because of a treasure it held. As soon as the machine was freed from its wrappings, I plugged it in and hit the “play” button to hear the voice of my father who had died four years earlier. Hearing Dad’s warm, cheery voice again was bitter-sweet.... but mostly sweet. In his message, Dad said:

Hello, Dianne. This is Dad. I meant to call you earlier... but anyway... I just wanted to report that I am back in the hospital. Nothing to worry about at the moment. I was having chest pain. I have gone through a battery of tests. Am feeling fine. Chest pain is gone. Still in the hospital. So anyway, I thought I would let you know. You might give me a call at your convenience. You take care...

...and the best part:

The number is 916-923-9747. You take care...

The answering machine added the time stamp: Tuesday, 6 pm. Dad didn't die during that hospital visit, but he did move on to his eternal reward after another hospital admission, or maybe it was two. We were able to talk during his final, brief hospital stay, on a Friday morning before Palm Sunday. Dad was waiting for neighbors to bring him his cell phone as well as some files to work on. Dad died in the early hours of Saturday morning just as Holy Week was about to start. I so wish that I could pick up the phone and dial the number: 916-932-9747. For now, we gather in the "thin place" of All Saints where we are invited to come close and feel the love and connection that endures between this life and the next. This day we remember that we are part of a great Cloud of Witnesses... that we are not alone... that our lives matter... and that our stories are intertwined with one another and with all creation.

The lives we live... in this moment... have touched lives in the past... and our relationships will live on in those who will live beyond us. Think back to a grandparent, or great grandparent. Who is the person in your life who was born the furthest back in time? For me, my Great Grandmother Josephine would be the one. Great Grandma Touri was born in Finland in the 1880's and came to the United States around the turn of the 20th century. For the younger ones here... your lives may well touch children, grandchildren, and maybe even great-grandchildren... if not your own offspring, then children who will bless your life in some manner. Your influence on younger ones will likely reach out into well into the 22nd century. Gathered here today... our collective lives and relationships reach out and span more than two centuries. Our lives impact the lives of others. We are part of one great beloved family. It is to this great family... that spans time and space... that Jesus offers his message of love and life.

In today's Gospel lesson, we are given Luke's version of the Beatitudes in Jesus' Sermon on the Plain... Beatitudes that are similar to Matthew's "Sermon on the Mount." Jesus looked up at the people and said, "Blessed are you... who are poor... you who are hungry... you who weep... you who feel outcast. Blessed are you for there is much room in you for new life to take root and grow." Unlike the Sermon on the Mount, the Sermon on the Plain includes "Woe to you" statements: "But woe to you who are filled with your own stuff, your own distractions, your false wealth... woe to you because there is little or no room inside for the soul to be moved and invite new growth." The blessings offer us a glimpse of life within God's life-giving realm. The woe statements illustrate life lived in opposition to God's dream for us. Blessings and woes... we know them. Jesus' message is to follow a path of blessings... seek to move beyond the confines of our limited lives... and to head towards God's longing that abundant life may be known by all.

After the blessings and the woes, Jesus then offers some simple, yet challenging directions:

27 “But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; 28 bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. 30 Give to everyone who asks of you, and if anyone takes away what is yours, do not ask for it back again. “

The Sermon on the Plain ends with the most simple and sacred rule:

Do to others as you would have them do to you.

We know this as... (The Golden Rule). The Golden Rule simply works... wouldn't you say? Have you ever found it to fail you? I believe that the Golden Rule is touchstone and guide for being in relationship with others... with family, friends and strangers... and especially with those who seem to be difficult and the most challenging. A form of the Golden Rule is found in all the world's major faith traditions. Jesus invites us to live into a life of blessing... to steer away from the path of woes and troubles... and seek to live a life that is in right relationship with others.

Imaging being among the crowd on the plain... on that day many years ago... listening to Jesus teach his disciples and all those who came to hear his words. You have walked quite a way to make it to this place. Feel it. Are you standing or are you sitting? Are you alone or have you come with someone? What hungers, what hurts, what hopes do you bring? Who else is in the crowd? I can see a man sitting with his arms around his knees, his face streaked with tears of sadness over the loss of his wife... I can see a young mother swaying and rocking an infant in one arm while holding the hand of an energetic toddler with her other. I can see a tax collector... and a potter... a baker and many widows. I see a lame man who came to be healed... a wealthy landowner who came to learn what all the fuss was about... and a beggar who has absolutely nothing to lose. There is a field hand whose body aches all over. There is a merchant... and a foreigner in strange garb... and a young boy who helped guide his elderly grandfather to this place. Jesus' message is for all people... living in all times... and in all places. His is a message of life is meant for all... for those whose hungers are manifold... and whose spirits are open for guidance... and for those who have simply been nudged by nagging curiosity... and even for those who are not ready to pay attention.

Day by day... we journey through this life on a path that will lead us all, one day, into the next life. Today, we gather together to hear some Good News that is food for the journey... news that the poor of every kind are welcome... that the hungry will be fed... that tears of grief and sadness will turn to laughter... and, at the same time, we are instructed that when we feel full and too satisfied... especially at the expense of others.. we will know just the opposite.

Jesus desires abundant life for all... and he mourns a human existence that is blind to the needs of others and unconcerned with the well-being of the whole of God's beloved creation. It is for us to be fully present... to listen with open hearts and open minds... to hear a message meant for all the generations... and... here... on this day... a message meant for we who gather here together in Jesus' name... surrounded by the bonds of family and friendship and love... that is God's greatest gift of all.

Amen...