

## **“Thanks for the Saints”**

November 6, 2016

*Thanksgiving and Thanks-living series*

This year, All Saints Day is different than in years past. Each year, we lift up names and remember loved ones who have died and who now rest in God’s peace. But this year, there’s a name that we read and a life that’s very closely linked with mine. My grandma is a saint we name today. I loved her, and I miss her. And I do thank God for her.

After my grandma died last December, my mom had my grandma’s mail forwarded to my parents’ house. In the midst of the mail and paperwork that arrived for months after her death, there was a one piece of mail that struck my mom. I don’t remember where it came from, but it was addressed to my grandma. It said, “Congratulations on your new home!”

I hope you get the joke. Her new home is eternal life in the presence of God - and it is cause for congratulations and celebration! My mom and I laughed when she told me, and it seemed fitting for All Saints Day. As we say thanks to God for the saints, we also hope in the promise of eternal life.

My grandma was a faithful follower of Christ when she died at 93 years old. She had shown me long before she died the instructions she had written down for her memorial service. And there was one that especially struck me. She loved Psalm 121. I love it, too. It’s a psalm I turn to for comfort and peace. It’s one I offer to others, too. I read it at hospital beds, and I’ve read it at many funerals: *I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.*

Well, my grandma insisted that it be read in the King James Version: *I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth.* And she even had written why she wanted that particular translation. That one is affirmative. There is no question about where our help comes from. So, when we celebrated her life and faith, I read those words.

Paul tells the people in Ephesus that the hope they have in Christ will lead others to praise God’s glory. It’s the faith and love of those in Ephesus that causes Paul to give thanks to God. It’s his prayer that they would know the hope that is God’s gift to them, the riches of their inheritance from God - eternal life, and the power of God. Paul says that the same power of resurrection that we know in Jesus is ours, too! It’s an incredible promise!

As we gather here probably with a mix of emotions about those we love who are now in the fullness of God's presence, Paul's words can offer comfort. Eternal life is what connects us to the saints, so even though they are not here with us, we can be confident that we share in the hope, riches, and power that they experience now. You and I carry with us the faith that they lived and shared. That spiritual connection is something that death can never sever. It doesn't mean that we don't feel the pain of separation, but we can trust in the deeper spiritual connection of eternal life.

How many of you have received a phone call asking you to vote for a particular candidate? Has anyone received a call from a Hollywood celebrity endorsing a particular candidate? Every political campaign has its share of celebrity endorsements, and many times, those endorsements make a difference.

For me, All Saints Day presents us with a challenge even as we gather, remember, and give thanks. Today is like Memorial Day for Christians, but that's not the end of it. In the midst of all the endorsements we hear, we have the opportunity every day to give Jesus Christ an endorsement as Lord and Savior of our lives.

We can tell others why we have the hope and strength that we have. We can tell others what God has brought us through. We can tell others why it matters to us to belong to a community of faith where we can offer the gifts that God has given us. We can be bold in speaking of Jesus Christ who came to save and is working powerfully among us by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Friends, sometimes it's as simple giving God glory and praise – calling it out when we experience it. It's not a bragging right, but a witness to the amazing grace and love of God. That's what Paul is saying to the Christians in Ephesus. You have a reason to give God thanks and praise. You have hope. You have an inheritance of eternal life. You have the power of resurrection - the power to bring new life where there was death! You have it because God is good, gracious, and abounding in steadfast love.

And we already know that it makes a difference! You and I are here because beloved saints have walked and talked their salvation story, and our lives have been changed! We are more faithful disciples because of what they said, what they did, how they lived, and even how they died knowing the love of Jesus Christ.

Saints show us that being a Christian is a partnership with God where we respond to God's grace. That doesn't mean perfection. The life of a saint isn't perfect or problem-free. When I think of my "saints," I think about their perseverance. They exemplify strong faith that endures in hard times, trusts God for help, and thanks God always. They glorify God with their lives and have shown me what it means to live with hope. Because of them, our faith in God is stronger, our trust in God is deeper, and our hope in God is alive and well.

And so we respond in faith. We carry their faith with us. We light candles in honor of them because they shared the light of Christ with us. Because of them, we know God better. Because of them, we are better disciples of Jesus Christ. Because of them, we will be called saints by those who come after us.

Holy Communion reminds us that Jesus died for you and me. We have new life and new hope in him. We also celebrate the feast that is to come when we die and experience eternal life in Jesus Christ. And we celebrate with those who experience that even now. As we say thanks for the saints, we're invited to come and remember God's grace at work in us. We're invited to the Lord's Table where we're surrounded by the witness of the saints and encouraged to be saints for others.

Thanks be to God for the saints! Amen.