

## ALL THE SAINTS

Ephesians 1:11-23  
Luke 6:20-31

Faith Community  
November 7, 2004

### Introduction

Good morning Saint David, Saint Ann, Saint Gary, Saint Jann, Saint Michael. In the Presbyterian Church, all the faithful are Saints. There are not higher and lower Christians – ordinary Christians and Super Christians. There isn't any process to go through in the Presbyterian church to get to sainthood, other than the one every Christian goes through in trusting in God and following Jesus Christ.

When we are accepted by God, we are all saints. All the people of God are saints. Our faithfulness is what matters. Today we celebrate the saints.

### I

Christianity is a religion that looks back in order to move forward. We look back in history to decide what is right to do today. It isn't just because of Santayana's dictum that those who do not remember the past are doomed to repeat it; we look back to our source, to find meaning and direction for the present.

This morning we look back at least two thousand years to see how to approach our situation in twenty-first century America. The heart of our service is opening this book and learning from it. Some parts of it were written five thousand years ago, some only two thousand years ago. This is where we find our foundation.

A college chaplain met with a group of students in the dorm one night to talk about worship. He asked the students what they found unusual about worship in the chapel.

One of the first people to respond said, "The weirdest thing is in the opening parade." The processional? Yea. "Where they bring down the great, big book." The Bible? Yea. "They bring it up and place it on the podium and then turn toward the preacher and, it's like, 'Here, work from this.'"

That's exactly what it's like. We find our way today by using the book that the people of God have been going to for more than two thousand years. We hear the word spoken for their times and apply it to our own time.

### II

We look back to remember who we are, so we can live faithfully in our world. It's in going back to our source that we know how to live in the present. It's like understanding what it means to be an American. We look back to our constitution – more than two hundred years old – to remember who we are and what we stand for – freedom, human rights, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, innocence until proven guilty.

In a similar way, we look back to our constitution – the Bible – to know how to act today. The words of the prophets, attacking dishonesty and the mistreatment of the poor, apply to our world today. The words of the Psalms still comfort, challenge and speak for us today.

Especially, we turn to the words and ministry of Jesus. What was important to him is important to us. The principles that he taught – like the beatitudes we read this morning – apply as much to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania today as they did to Bethlehem in Judea then. We look back to remember what is important, and then apply that word to our world.

We are part of the on-going movement of Christianity in the world. As you enter Winchester Cathedral in England, there is a sign on the wall. It says, “You are entering a conversation that began long before you were born and will continue long after you’re dead.” Today we celebrate the saints all along the way.

### III

Today we especially celebrate the saints of Faith Community. This is a very difficult Sunday. As I read each of those names, I remember the person, their faith, the circumstances of their life and death.

These are the saints of our church family. They have given to us so that we can be where we are today. Some served as church schoolteachers, committee members, elders and deacons. They supported this church when it was a young, struggling congregation. We reap the benefit of what they have sown.

They cared for people in this congregation, they needed the care of this church family, they taught and learned. They have shown by their words and their lives what it means to be Christian today. They lived with us in faith.

We are thankful and we celebrate their lives.

### IV

In Poland the celebration of All Saint’s Day is different from ours. Everyone except transportation and emergency workers has the day off. People attend church, celebrate their family members, and go to the gravesites to remember. All Saints’ Day is the day with the most traffic, because people are making their way to the family gravesites.

People bring flowers and wreaths, and especially candles to light at the graveside. Whole families travel together to honor their ancestors. On the evening of All Saints’ Day, the cemeteries glow with the flickering, colorful light of thousands of candles.

Since it is in late autumn it is a reminder that everybody’s life is temporary and that we will all be gone like the leaves on the trees. For Polish people it is a day set aside to halt the busyness of life and honor the memory of their ancestors. It is a day to set aside the stresses and problems of everyday life to remember and honor their loved ones.

## **Conclusion**

One of the first people who died in our congregation was a young boy with cerebral palsy. His parents divorced not long after his birth, and his mother was caring for Christopher and his brother by herself. He couldn't walk or play, like other children his age. Most of the time he was curled over, his arms turned in. On the day of Christopher's funeral Sheila watched his four-year-old brother. They had the chance to talk about Christopher's death and funeral. He was quiet; then he said, "It's OK. He's happy now. He can run and play baseball with the other kids."

Christopher Sproul is one of our saints. Even at 4 years old, his brother grasped the hope of resurrection and the newness of life it brings.

Amen.