

“What Every Saint Has Come To Know”

Dear friends, Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus on this All Saints Sunday, a day when we remember and celebrate those who've gone before us in the faith. As much as any other in the course of the year, today is one of those days (I would imagine) that hits home for many of us in a more personal way than most. It's a day when we look back on the lives of those who are (no longer with us) and when we look forward to that day when we will see them again.

For some of you, it's the life of a spouse. Having served here for a number of years, I've watched as quite a few of you have said goodbye to ones with whom you've shared your lives. For others, it's another family member: a brother or sister, a parent or child, a grandparent, a grandchild; someone who's no longer here. For others, it's a friend or an acquaintance, a classmate or a colleague at work. There aren't many of us (here today), who have not had to face, in (one way or another) the reality of life on this earth coming to an end.

The good news today is that God has a plan when it comes to life. He's made a promise that not even the end of life can separate us from those we love. And it's with that plan and that promise (in mind) that we remember and celebrate the lives of the saints.

Just for fun, I went back and did a little counting. I found the old handwritten records and matched them up with what we now have online. Do you know there have been 1,712 baptisms (here at St. Timothy's) since 1962? (That's quite a few who've been brought into the family through baptism.) Do you know how many confirmations we've had, adults and teenagers combined? (1,883) How about weddings? There have been 582 weddings, since the time this church started. How about memorials or funerals? There have been 410 celebrations of life in 53 years; that's quite a few! How many cups of coffee do you think we've shared? (We lost track.) Thousands, if not tens of thousands!

Now, some of you are probably thinking, “This guy has too much time on his hands.” You might be right. (I'll tell you what I think it is.) I never get tired of counting the saints. I never get tired of remembering the people who have shared the faith with us.

We've all known people whom we've considered to be saints, those whose lives have gone “above and beyond” what's natural and normal. The Bible says a saint is a person who has lived or died in the faith, one who (in the course of their life) has learned to put their faith and trust in Jesus.

In that sense, all of us here today are saints. We're all among those whose faith and trust is in Christ. (Take a moment and turn to the person next to you and say hello to one of the saints. Say “Hello there, saint!”)

Now, that might seem a bit strange to pass on (and receive) that kind of greeting. You might not think of yourself as a saint. You might not think of that person (next to you) as a saint! But it's true; you and I are among the saints. Today we celebrate the saints. Today we remember that's who we are.

“What Every Saint Has Come To Know.” I want to keep this simple and spend a little time with some of the lessons the saints have learned. There are many lessons the saints have learned. I want to keep it simple and zero in on just three. They're not the only ones, but they are ones we dare not miss.

Let's take them one at a time. (Here's the first.) Lesson number one: This life makes sense only in relation to the next. This life makes sense only in relation to the next.

There was an interesting article (a while back) in one of the publications I receive that was talking about what motivates people in life, what keeps them moving forward. It talked about a number of things that motivate: a sense of responsibility, a desire to contribute to the world. It said family can be a motivation. It said a person's career can keep them going. By far, the number one motivating factor was hope. It said people who live with hope are the most highly motivated. It said, no matter what else happens, those who live with hope have the greatest reason to continue.

Now, if you think about, it shouldn't be surprising. (It happens to all of us.) Those times when there's been no hope on the horizon? When there's no light at the end of the tunnel? Those are the times when it's most difficult to keep going. Take away our hope and this life makes little sense. Renew that hope, and it all begins to turn around.

On this All Saints Sunday (and it's not coincidental), all three of our lessons point us to the future, to the promised hope that belongs to us in Jesus. Isaiah speaks of a mountain on which the Lord will prepare "a feast of rich food... a day," he says, "when death will be defeated and all of the promises of God will be fulfilled."

John's revelation gives us a vision of that day when "the old will pass away and the new will begin... a new heaven," he says, "and a new earth in place of the old."

The story from John's gospel, about Lazarus being raised from the dead; more than anything else it's a story of hope. This life makes sense only in relation to the next. This life makes sense only when we realize it's not the end.

Now, I mentioned (already) the number of memorial services there have been since this church first started. Those 410 who died were not all members – many were relatives of members; but either way, that's quite a few.

What's interesting (about memorial services) is that when life on this earth comes to an end, no one wants to hear about this life. (No one does.) We want to hear about the person who died, about their life, but not about this life. What we want to hear about is the next. (That's what we want to hear.) What's interesting, also, is that when we hear about the life to come, (what's next) all of a sudden we begin to reassess the life we now have.

It's true. This life makes sense only in relation to the next. In fact, all throughout the Scriptures, that's what the Bible tells us. Solomon says that it's "all in vain" if what we have (and experience) in this life is all there is. Paul says it's all worth nothing, "if for this life only" we have lived with hope. And so the psalmist writes, (in bringing the two together), "Teach us to order our days, that what we do with our lives might not be in vain."

That's the first lesson every saint has learned: this life makes sense only in relation to the next. The second is similar: We have a finite time to make an infinite difference. We have a finite time to make an infinite difference.

Now, I realize these lessons are all tied together. (On this All Saints Sunday, it's all on the same theme.) But there are two things in this (second lesson) worth noting. One is that our time on this earth is limited. It's finite in length. The psalmist says "threescore and ten, and if we are fortunate, fourscore." That's what we have. That's all (in this life) there is.

At the same time, the Bible says that "from the foundation of the world, you and I have been called and chosen in Christ." It says that from before the time God created this world, he had already put into place a plan to save it in Christ. In other words, life on this earth is limited, but life (in Jesus) never ends.

I don't know about you, but I find great peace in knowing that my life was already known and that my future has been secured. We're not just drifting along, (like so many people seem to think), waiting to see where it will all one day end up. There is a plan God has in place. And there is a place in that plan in which you and I fit.

One, there's a finite time we've been given. And two, there's an infinite difference we can make. What we do with our lives (while we're here) matters eternally in the plan and purposes of God.

Now, just think about that for a moment and apply it to the opportunities you have in life. (We could talk about this for a long time, build an entire series.)

Any parents here today? (We're starting a parenting class.) Just think about the lives of your children and the eternal difference you can make for them. As parents, (or grandparents), there's nothing more important we do than to pass on the faith.

Any students here today, wondering how you might spend your life? There are countless ways to make a difference, and making a difference is a great way to spend your life. (There are a lot of things you can do.) But it's what you do in the name of Jesus (and for the sake and cause of Christ) that has an impact that carries on into eternity.

It's that old saying: "Only one life will soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last." (Don't miss the point.) There are a lot of things we do in life, and everything we do (in life) is not meant to be eternal. But some things are, and some things will be. Make sure you're spending the time (you need) with the things that are.

This life makes sense only in relation to the next. We have a finite time to make an infinite difference. And (number three), when Jesus writes your name in his book, it's written in his book forever.

Now, I don't know how it will all happen when it happens. (We need to be careful here.) The Bible talks about the "Book of Life" in which the names of all those who have lived and died in Christ will be written. (I don't know how it will happen.) But I wouldn't be surprised if it went something like this.

When Judgment Day comes; the day when this world (as we know it) will finally come to an end; we'll all be standing there. All the nations will gather. The Bible says "every mouth will be silent and the whole world will be held accountable to God." No one will be left out.

Do you know what will happen? Maybe not in this way, but in some way; each of our names will be read, and each of us will be judged, and none of us will measure up. Not one.

Then the Book will be opened to find out who will finally be let in. Starting with the "A's" (Adam, Amanda, Andrea), and then the "B's" (Betsy and Bill and Bob), and the "C's" and the "D's", all the way through, until every name is read.

One of three things will happen. One, God will open the book and your name will already be there. Written by Jesus, from before the time this world was created; written in the knowledge and the foreknowledge of God. Under the "A's" and the "B's" and the "C's", until it's all over, all the names will be read and Jesus will say to each one, "Come on in." (That's one option.)

The second, God will open the book and (again) every name will be read, including yours. Chosen in your baptism, washed clean in the blood of the Lamb, your name will have been written at the time the water was poured, and those words were shared, and (again) Jesus will welcome you in.

And three, if not the other two, then the third; God will open the book and your name will not be there. No "Andrea or Adam, Bill or Bob, Cathy or Carl, David or Donna or Dan", no one with your particular name. (It's not there.) But then, the Father will look to the Son, and the Son will look to the Spirit, and they'll all agree. It wasn't written in the book, but it will be, because of Christ.

"I died for her" Jesus will say. "His faith was real" the Spirit will testify. "This one is one of my own" the Father will announce. And then your name will be written in the only book that counts, (never to be erased), and all because of Christ.

Now, I started today by mentioning the number of weddings and baptisms and confirmations and memorials we have had since the time this church started. Let me close by reading two sets of names that are also part of our church history.

The first are the names of the ones who (today) will be receiving the sacrament of Holy Communion for the first time. As I read their names, know that these are among the saints, those called and chosen by Jesus: Christopher Amey, Natalie Bachman, Gabrielle D'Angelo, Isabella DeFilippis, Casey Fritzen, Mackenzie Gallup, Jacob Ganatra, Andrew Hall, Alayna Mackaness, Claudia Nelson, Gunnar Paedon, and Isabella Weber. That's the first list; joining us today at the Lord's Table.

And now, the list of those who have gone before us in the faith; those who have now fully realized the promises that are ours in Christ. I'm not going to read the entire list, but only those from the past five years. Listen to the names of these saints and know that (in Jesus) we will see them again.

See how many you remember: Lorraine Johnson, Connie Ryan, Spyros Stamos, Chris Caravayo, Gordon Selbo, Kathy Swanson, George Gioia, Norma Lima, Marilyn Kremidas, Pat Rajala, Clarian Pintacura, Margaret Baldwin, Bill Elliott, Linda Denton, Ray Baring, Vince Vargas, Beverly Pedersen, Alyce Nelson, Corrine Sliper. Loretta Norris, Gloria Gillette, Jeanne Atwood, Stan Andersen, Judy Klinger, Ursala Caravayo, Ray Swanson, Frank Lovoi, Howard Olson, Cosette Winter, Karen Roberts, Ken Gulbraa, Kathleen Hawley, Jeannette Olson, Doris Campagna, and Jeanette Nill.

Dear friends, fellow saints, don't ever forget. This life makes sense only in relation to the next. We have a finite time to make an infinite difference. And when Jesus writes your name in his book, it's written in his book forever.

Let's pray. Lord God, we thank you for the promises that are ours in Jesus and for the hope and assurance we have because of what you have done for us in him. We thank you for the lives of those saints gone before us, for those who have placed their faith in you, given us an example to follow, and who now find themselves eternally in your kingdom. Help us to follow their example, to live each day in faith, and to take advantage of the limited time we now have, knowing that what lies ahead will never end. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.