SERMON DEUTERONOMY 34 WHAT WILL THEY SAY ABOUT US? November 1, 2026

Today we observe what is known in the church as All Saints Day. Now this brings up the basic question: what is a saint? The word saint comes from a Greek word meaning "holy," and occurs 62 times in the New Testament, mostly in the letters of the Apostle Paul. Instead of using the word saints, some of the more modern translations of the Bible use "holy" or "God's people." In the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions, there are thousands of canonized saints, individuals who have been examined and officially recognized by the Church as men and women who lived exceptionally holy lives.

However, we as Protestants believe that a saint is someone who believes in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. Now when the New Testament speaks of the saints, it refers to Christians collectively, not just a few persons of outstanding spiritual qualities. Thus, in a sense, all Christians are saints. Now I know that it may be hard for some of you to believe that the person sitting next to you or the one standing up here in front of you is considered a saint in the eyes of the Lord. But saints are not perfect people; they just believe in and trust God with their lives.

It reminds me of the story of two brothers who were crooked lawyers, always cheating someone. The only reason they went to church was because it made them look good and opened the door to potential clients. When the less evil one died, the surviving brother promised the church a large donation if they would describe his brother as a saint in his eulogy. The church really needed the money and eventually came up with a way to secure the contribution without compromising its values. The eulogy accurately described the life of the deceased, identifying and listing the many sins he had committed. Then in conclusion, the speaker pointed at the surviving brother and said: "But compared to his brother sitting over there, the departed was truly a saint."

As Christians, we cannot claim to be saints based on our own works or effort. Sainthood is not achieved by what we do, but by what our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has already done and is doing for us. It is a gift, freely given by God to all who hear and believe that the Son of God died for them, achieving for them victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil.

A little boy attended a church that had beautiful stained-glass windows. He was told that the windows contained pictures of Saint Matthew, Saint Mark, Saint Luke, Saint John and Saint Paul. One day someone asked him: "What's a saint?" To which, he replied: "A saint is a person that the light shines through." That's a great definition; a saint reflects the love and light of Jesus Christ by how they live their daily lives.

On this All Saints Sunday, we remember those individuals, those saints who have already gone on before us to be with the Lord. It is good to remember loved ones and friends who died in

service to the Lord. We do so, not in great sorrow and hopelessness, but in the sure hope of the resurrection. We remember them and believe that as we gather for communion in a few minutes, we also gather with the hosts of heaven. All Saints Sunday is not a day of separation, but a day of reunion; a day when we thank God for His wonderful gift of salvation that will allow all of us to be gathered with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who died that we might live; who suffered for our sins that we might have forgiveness; who defeated death so that we, the saints who remain here on earth, might know the resurrection.

Earlier we recited the Apostles' Creed. Have you ever given any serious thought to what the phrase "I believe in the holy catholic church, the communion of saints" means? The word "catholic" used here means universal. We believe in the universal church which includes all Christians, all believers, all denominations, every one of us who bears witness to Jesus Christ.

The "Communion of Saints" is understood as the belief of all Christians – Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants – that all of God's people on earth and in heaven are connected in a communion, a fellowship. It refers to the spiritual union of the members of the Christian Church, living and dead, those on earth and those in heaven. We are all part of a single "mystical body" with Jesus Christ as the head. Hebrews 12:1 acknowledges that we are "surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses." The *Message* paraphrases it like this: "All these pioneers blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on." I don't know if you have ever thought about it this way, but when we recite the Apostles' Creed, we can take hope and assurance that as we meet the challenges and temptations of everyday life, we have a cheering section of faithful family members and friends who have prepared the way for us.

We come this morning to remember those individuals who have lived out the teachings of Jesus Christ to the best of their ability, and who have influenced our spiritual growth – parents, pastors, Sunday School teachers, relatives, friends, and neighbors. Each of us can name "saints" who have shaped and influenced our lives. For the most part they were not people considered extraordinary by the world's or the church's standards. Instead, they remained faithful in the midst of ordinary events of life, often difficult circumstances. As I have told you before, my mother had the greatest influence on my early Christian life and is one of the main reasons that I am here today. We must never forget those who have helped us grow in Christ.

Likewise, we who remain here on earth must recognize the awesome responsibility and privilege that we have to influence the lives of others and to help them grow spiritually. As Jesus Christ invites us to His table this morning, so we are to invite others. In every age, Christianity is always just one generation away from extinction; thus, we are called to pass on the Good News. And we do this by setting an example for those who follow us as our loved ones have set for us.

Here's a thought for us to chew on: what kind of example are you setting; what type of legacy are you leaving – saintly or nobody? How do you want to be remembered: best grandparent, best husband or wife, best teacher, rich and powerful, world traveler, storyteller or someone who made a difference in the lives of others? Listen to how Moses is described and is remembered by the Jewish people and all Christians in his obituary as found in the 34th chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy, verses 5 through 12.

Read Deuteronomy 34:5-12

What a testimony to Moses, what a legacy! He knew God as a friend; an entire nation grieved his passing; God Himself buried him; outside of Jesus, no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome miracles that Moses did. You can believe that Moses definitely heard those words from God: "Well done, my good and faithful servant!"

Now is it possible to live under a delusion? You may think you are kind, considerate and gracious, when you are really not. During Sunday School one morning, a lady shared that she loved everybody and always showed love. The rest of the class was silent because in reality she was a hateful person. So how do other people really see us? What if you could read your own obituary?

I may have shared with you before the story of Alfred Nobel, inventor of dynamite, who woke up one morning in 1888 to read his own obituary. The obituary was printed as result of a simple error at the newspaper. You see, it was Alfred's brother who had died, and the reporter mistakenly reported the death of the wrong brother.

Now any person would be disturbed under these circumstances, but Alfred was shocked because he now realized that the world saw him as the "Dynamite King," the great industrialist who had made a great fortune from explosives. Thus, as far as the general public was concerned, this was his legacy. All of his efforts to promote peace were not recognized or given serious consideration. He was simply a merchant of death. And for that alone he would be remembered.

As he read his obituary, Alfred resolved to let the world know the true meaning and purpose of his life. His last will and testament would be an expression of his life's ideals and ultimately would be why we would remember him. The result was the most valuable of all prizes given to those who had done the most for the cause of world peace, the "Nobel Peace Prize."

Now during my ministry, I have officiated at many funerals or celebrations of life. There is usually a time in the service for a family member or friend to share a eulogy of the departed. I also sometimes provide an opportunity following the message for members of the congregation to share their thoughts on the deceased. Now I have heard some heart-warming

stories; stories that brought tears to your eyes; stories that made you laugh so hard it hurt; and even some stories that should never be told in church or anywhere else. We don't have time for all these stories, but someday Judy and I are going to write a book about them.

But these stories told a lot about the person because they came from their families, friends and associates, the people who knew them the best. At memorial services or celebrations of life, I often use a simple illustration to stress the importance of how we live our daily lives. I point to the two dates on the bulletin; the date the person was born and the date the Lord called them home. Both dates are important in the life of that person, but that little dash between the dates is the most important, because it represents the time that the person spent here on this earth. Thus, how we will be remembered after we are gone will depend on how we spent that little dash, how we lived and loved.

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to officiate at the funeral of a dear friend of Judy and mine, Barbara Fentiman. Now Barbara had lived an extremely interesting and full life. She had worked for the CIA and thus, for years she was not able to tell anybody what she did; she was only allowed to say that she worked for the State Department until her service was finally declassified. During her career, she lived in several foreign countries including Austria, Thailand and Kenya. She had climbed Mount Kilimanjaro, and enjoyed daily jogs through the streets of Vienna. She once rode with a group from her office in Thailand to a restaurant in Saigon that was supposed to have the best French onion soup. Their boss was not happy when he found out about their excursion since it occurred during the Viet Nam War!

But at her service, which was standing room only, there was hardly any mention of these accomplishments. Person after person got up to tell how loving, caring and kind Barbara was. There were stories of how Barbara reached out in love in their time of need; how she was such a great friend; that you could always count on her; and that she was such a giving person. These testimonies left no doubt that Barbara was a good Christian woman; that she had made the most of her dash; that she had made a difference in the lives of others; and that she had lived her life as Jesus Christ intended. Barbara was a saint.

Are we saints? How will people describe us when we have taken our last breath? We all need to think about this; because we never know when God is going to call us home. Are we making the most of our dash? How do you want to be remembered? It will not be based on how rich you were, what job you held, or what your accomplishments were, but whether you made a difference in the lives of others. It's not too late as Alfred Nobel discovered. As you prepare to receive communion, take some time to ask God to help you make the necessary changes in your life. May we each someday hear those wonderful words from God: "Well done, my good and faithful servant!" Amen