ALL TOGETHER, NOW
All Saints Sunday -- November 1, 2026
Revelation 7: 9-17
Rev. Dean Feldmeyer

(Singing)
For all the saints, who from their labors rest,
To thee, by grace, before the world confessed

Let me introduce you to some of the saints who have influenced my life:

Larry Steele & Ralph Barnhardt -- Two senior citizens, they remembered my name and bent over to shake my hand every Sunday and welcome me to church and tell me how glad they were to see me.

Sometimes they would ask me a question about my life, my new baby brother, the upcoming holiday, or Vacation Bible School. And in this, I knew that they loved me and cared about me.

Jack and Nancy Tolson – They were both teachers, friends of my parents who went to the same church as we did. Whenever they discovered that I was interested in a topic, they would bring a book on that topic to church and give it to me.

They introduced me to *The Hobbit*, and to the music of Peter, Paul, & Mary. And, when my father died, they drove from Indianapolis to be at his memorial service though they had not seen him, physically in over 20 years.

(Singing)
Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blessed.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Mrs. Stanley – She was in charge of acolytes, and she ran that program like a Marine drill sergeant. She could snap her fingers and make a noise louder than a rifle shot. And she taught me that the symbols of the church really are important and should be treated with dignity and respect.

The Stringers – who had 9 children of their own but still managed to find the time to run the MYF program and make sure that it was more than just playtime, that it contained spiritual and missional things as well.

(Singing)
Thou wast their rock, their fortress, and their might;
Thou Lord, their captain in the well-fought fight…

Ross Marrs -- The pastor who taught me that studying the Bible could actually be fun, that theology was a fascinating way of looking at life and the world, that science was not the enemy but the colleague of faith, and that I didn't have to check my brain at the door whenever I entered the church.

It was he who confirmed me and, years later, when we tracked him down and found him in Bloomington, Indiana, it was he who agreed to baptize my son, Ben.

Mark Dove -- Another pastor, who smiled all the time even though, thanks to Bell's Palsy, he could smile with only half of his face. He came to visit my mother at the hospital

when she sat at the bedside of my brother who was hanging on the edge of life. He wasn't our pastor, but our pastor was out of the country, and he came because I reached out to him and asked him to.

Bob Sinks – Yet another pastor, who taught me to have the courage of my convictions no matter what other people thought, to stand up for what I believed, and what I believed God was calling me to be and do.

And all those pastors and lay people who carved time out of their schedules to be church camp counselors, to run the district and conference youth ministries, to drive us to the meetings on Saturday mornings, and to help us get through that awkward and painful thing we call "growing up."

(Singing)

Thou in the darkness, drear, their one true light.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Marion and Norma Gaston – who volunteered to be the teachers in the Jr. Hi. Sunday School class when I was in that Jr. Hi. Group.

Russell Tague – who hired my brother, Scot, and me to work on his small farm, hoeing the corn out of the beans and the beans out of the corn. And paid us the unimaginably generous wage of 50 cents per hour.

(Singing)

O may thy soldiers, faithful, true, and bold,
fight as the saints who nobly fought of old,

Jim Thomas and Earl "Rudi" Rudisell and Mrs. Oliver and Mr. Johnson – These were just a few of the many teachers who instilled in me the importance of fairness and the love of learning, the power of books, and the marvelous, depth and breadth of history.

Rudy Verderber and Lauren Lashley – Two of my college professors who taught me the beauty and the potential power of words – spoken and written.

Bob Tannehill and Bogey Dunn, two of my seminary professors, who taught me how to approach scripture with a loving and critical eye, who taught me that it is a good thing to believe but an even better thing to be able to change my mind when a new truth becomes evident.

(Singing)

And win with them the victor's crown of gold.
Alleluia, Alleluia!

And, of course, my parents –

Marvin Feldmeyer – who taught me how to read music. How to shoot a gun, and how to listen and think. Who taught me how to be a father and a husband, how to treat your wife and your children.

And **Donna Feldmeyer** – who taught me to cook, and do laundry and to sew, how to type and how to change a diaper, how to think, and to ask questions.

She taught me how to stand up for myself and for others who were younger, smaller, weaker, poorer and more vulnerable than me. And she taught me how to not be influenced by toxic people, by mean people, by the hypercritical and narrow minded and hypocritical people of the world.

These are the saints who have assisted me along the journey that has been my life. There are dozens, yea, scores of others that I have not taken the time to mention, here, today. And they have all contributed to making me who I am. To them, I owe a great mountain of gratitude.

And I owe them my very best efforts to be the people they taught me and enabled me to be so that, one day, someone may list me among their personal saints.

(Singing)

O blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
yet all are one in thee, for all are thine.
Alleluia, Alleluia!

What I'm talking about, here, brothers and sisters is the concept of **Christian Community**. I'm using the word community on purpose because I think the word "family" has been overused to the point of rendering it nearly meaningless. We hear employers call their companies "the ____ family." We hear groups of friends call themselves family. In fact, just about any group of people who comes together more than twice will probably find themselves talking in terms of family.

Commercials are some of the worst offenders, of course. Remember the one for Olive Garden? "When you're here, you're family." Or we all know that Bob Evans restaurants treat "strangers like friends, and friends like family."

There is no shortage of family metaphors in the Bible, of course. Jesus called God, Abba. It's usually translated "father" in English but that is incorrect. Most scholars tell us that the word Abba, an Aramaic word, is much less formal and much more familiar, more intimate than the word "father." Abba would be more like "Dad" or even "Daddy."

Where Jesus tends to talk of his disciples as friends, Paul speaks of the followers of Jesus as brothers and sisters. We are called, he tells us, over and over again, to love one another as sister and brother, <u>unconditionally</u>, and with <u>grace</u>, <u>love</u>, <u>acceptance</u> and <u>forgiveness</u> abundant.

When my son, Ben, and his wife, Carrie, went off to Pennsylvania so he could attend graduate school at Penn State it was the first time that either of them would be living more than thirty minutes from home. Now the time-distance was more like 9 hours of driving.

We helped them move and one of my last pieces of advice before our rather tearful and sentimental departure was, "Find a church." The church, I said, is where you'll find your surrogate family. Your parents and grandparents, your brothers and sisters, and even your

surrogate sons and daughters will be there to help you, to nurture you, to dream with you, to listen to you. They will be your family when we can't be.

And, while I hate to brag, I was right. After a while they discovered the Mt. Nittany United Methodist Church and before long they were involved with a young marrieds class and working with the youth ministry of the church.

When Ben got his Ph.D. they moved to Knoxville, Tennessee where Ben would teach at the University of Tennessee and they joined the Ebenezer United Methodist Church where they met the folks who would help them learn to be parents.

When we left Columbus, Ohio, to go to Wilmington, people in our church, there, knew that our daughter, Sarah, would be staying to complete her college education at Ohio State. Within hours of our announcement that we were leaving, the surrogate moms and grandmothers emerged from the back row of the church and Sarah was met with letters, cards and phone calls telling her that she would never want for a hot meal, a warm bed, or a shoulder to cry on if she needed one.

I could go on and on with this and probably every one of you has had some other person in your life who guided and shaped you as you grew up. Parents, of course, but other adults as well.

A GENERATION IN TROUBLE

On this **All Saints Sunday**, when we celebrate the impact that other people have had on our lives, whether they were Christian believers or not, we are, even as we sing these hymns of celebration, living with a **generation that may be entering a season of crisis like no other in our lifetime.**

These young people are what sociologists call **I-Gen**, or the Information Generation. They are, generally speaking, young people born **between 2000 and 2020 (5-25years of age)**. These are the people, many of whom will be **making the decisions** that manage the world we live in ten years from now and, folks, they are going to need help.

They are the first generation to grow up with smart phones and social media as part of their consciousness. In 2012, for the first time, half the population of the United States owned smart phones. In 2011 about 23 percent of teenagers owned smart phones. Today that number has risen to 95 percent.

And as the use of smart phones increased, so did the use of social media at a parallel rate.

But while the use of smart phones and social media has increased exponentially since 2012, the generation using those things has become more and more unhappy, unsatisfied, and depressed with each passing year.

The **Neilson** organization and the **Pew** organization, both of which have done extensive studies of the effects of social media and cell phone use on teenagers have come to agree on this one thing independently: **Gen-Z (1997-2012) is on the brink of the worst mental health crisis in decades.**

Research by these two esteemed organizations shows that today's teenagers are more **comfortable in their bedrooms**, communicating by text than they are in a public place, talking to each other. Compared to the Millennial Generation who preceded them by just a couple of years, this generation is less likely to smoke, less likely to do drugs, less likely to date, less likely to hang out with friends, and less likely to get their driver's license at age 16. They are also less likely to engage in violent behavior or to act out sexually in their teen years. Don't see a problem yet? Keep reading.

Twelfth graders are going out less in 2015 than eighth graders did in 2009. Only about half as many high school seniors go out on dates as did either Millennials or GenX'ers.

Today, when we compare all of the social markers of dating, drinking, smoking, driving, working, making out, and all the things that usually define the teenage years we discover that the numbers that define the 18-year-olds of this generation are about the same as the 15-year-olds of a generation ago. And the 15-year-olds of this generation are about the same as the 12 and 13-year-olds of the previous generation.

The number of teens who get together with their friends nearly every day has dropped by 40 percent since 2000.

Jean Twenge, writing for The Atlantic points to "The Monitoring the Future" survey, funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse … [which] has asked 12th-graders more than 1,000 questions every year since 1975 … The survey asks teens how happy they are and also how much of their leisure time they spend on various activities…The results could not be clearer: Teens who spend more time than average on screen activities are more likely to be unhappy, and those who spend more time than average on non-screen activities are more likely to be happy.

"…recent research suggests that screen time, in particular social-media use, does indeed cause unhappiness. One study asked college students with a Facebook page to complete short surveys on their phone over the course of two weeks. They'd get a text message with a link five times a day, and report on their mood and how much they'd used Facebook. The more they'd used Facebook, the unhappier they felt…

"…at the generational level, when teens spend more time on smartphones and less time on in-person social interactions, loneliness is more common.

"**So is depression**. Once again, the effect of screen activities is unmistakable: The more time teens spend looking at screens, the more likely they are to report symptoms of depression. Eighth graders who are heavy users of social media increase their risk of depression by 27 percent, while those who play sports, go to religious services, or even do homework more than the average teen cut their risk significantly.

"Teens who spend three hours a day or more on electronic devices are 35 percent more likely to have a risk factor for suicide…One piece of data that indirectly but stunningly captures kids' growing isolation, for good and for bad: Since 2007, the homicide rate among

teens has declined, but the **suicide rate** has increased. As teens have started spending less time together, they have become less likely to kill one another, and more likely to kill themselves. In 2011, for the first time in 24 years, the teen suicide rate was higher than the teen homicide rate."

THE ANSWER IS CLEAR

So, what is to be done**? How can we save this new generation** from the negative effects of the new technology that holds them so tightly in its grasp?

Brothers and sisters, I am happy to tell you that **we have the answer to that problem**. No, let me rephrase that: We **ARE** the answer to that problem. The answer to the loneliness, the isolation, the separation, estrangement, and despair that threatens to harm our children and grandchildren is nothing less than an authentic, intentional, purposeful **COMMUNITY** of which they can be a part.

We are, or at least can be, that community.

We are the surrogate grandparents and parents and brothers and sisters of those who feel sad every time they get on social media but continue to do it anyway so desperate are they for some genuine human connection.

We are the people with a purpose that lies outside and beyond ourselves, that gives meaning to our lives and richness to our fellowship.

We are the ones who are, as a community of faith, the very resurrected body of Christ. We, through our experience of and commitment to God as he is made known to us in Jesus Christ**, have what it takes to reach out with a kind and gentle hand** to all those who are lonely and depressed.

We can **stoop to shake hands with a child**. No cell phone, no I-pad, no computer, can do that. We can open our arms to hold someone who is hurting, who is wounded or broken or ill – in body, in mind, in spirit.

We can feed those who are **hungry** no matter what the source of their hunger. We can heal the **sick** no matter in what part of them the sickness has taken hold. We can slake their thirst. We can go to them when they are imprisoned whether by bars or by despair.

We can accept them when everyone else has turned their backs.

NEVER ALONE

Let me close this All Saints celebration, this morning, by relating a personal experience.

A couple of years ago I was diagnosed with **three kinds of skin cancer and a form of lymphoma** within about a 20-month period.

It was the lymphoma which brought on the first panic attack I've ever had and which I hope never to repeat. I was always the guy who kind of rolled his eyes when other people talked about their panic attacks but now I was the one whose heart was racing and who couldn't breath and had to pull off the side of the road until it passed.

I also learned that, when you have cancer, you have to learn a whole new vocabulary, a whole new jargon, a whole new way of talking. I had to learn words like melanoma, and squamous cell, and basil cell and my personal favorite: **subcutaneous T-cell lymphoma mycosis fungoides.** I had to learn to say the word chemotherapy without having another panic attack.

But I learned one other thing as well. I learned that no one ever gets cancer alone. When you get cancer, your whole family gets it with you. Your friends get it with you as well. And your church gets it, too.

And no one ever beats cancer alone.

I learned that I was held aloft on a cloud of prayers when I went through those surgeries. I learned that even when they say it's just a simple outpatient procedure it can still lay you up for three days at home and those three would have seemed like a thousand without the presence of friends and family.

I learned that we, that is, **we human beings**, are not meant to be alone. We are **pack animals**, if you will. We are tribal and clannish. We are **meant to be together, with other human beings**.

We are, as the alien observed, in the movie, "Starman," at our best when things are at their worst. And I learned something that I already knew but is good to learn over again every once in a while, and that is this: That we are all called to be the saints of God for one another. That, as the hymn says of the Saints of God --

> They lived not only in ages past;
> there are hundreds of thousands still.
> The world is bright with the joyous saints
> who love to do Jesus' will.
> You can meet them in school, on the street, in the store,
> in church, by the sea, in the house next door;
> they are saints of God, whether rich or poor,
> and I mean to be one too.

AMEN