Sermon For Sunday November 1 2026

All Saints Sunday

Are there any saints here today? Contrary to the popular idea that a saint is a very, very good person, the Christian understanding is that a saint is anyone who is baptized and believes in Jesus. So let me ask again, any saints here today? [show of hands] Good! We have to practice thinking of ourselves as saints, I think, because we sort of get caught up in our understanding of ourselves as sinners, don't we? And I'm not saying we aren't sinners. Luther described Christians as *simul iustus et peccator*—simultaneously saints and sinners—made in God's image, while not quite able to live fully into God's goodness and mercy.

All Saints Day is like a family reunion of all the saints and sinners who ever lived. The whole Christian community connects through the past, present, and future as we remember and give thanks for all the faithful who have gone before us, and delight in the new sisters and brothers in Christ who have joined us through the sacrament of Holy Baptism.

No doubt some of you bring pain with you to this family reunion. People always do. Some of your favorite saints may not be here this year. Some are mourning a friend, a spouse, a child–someone whose inspiration and encouragement meant a lot, helped us become who we are today. Some are not mourning anyone in particular, but rather the great sum of losses piled on top of each other. Please know that it is right to bring this reunion all those feelings in all their complexity. Know that we honour in particular all who are still very much present in our lives, whether or not they are tangibly alive.

Matthew's Gospel today has Jesus talking to people and about people who are blessed. You know, as I do, that we are blessed to be in each other's company—those of us who are mourning, those who are working hard to

bring about peace, those who are in trouble for walking the talk like Jesus did. We need to be together. We are blessed to be with each other on this journey. And all around us, seen and unseen, are the saints who have been part of the family of faith on earth but have now died. On this All Saints Day, we delight in our family reunion with all of God's children from every time and place, blessed saints every one.

Now let's look ahead. What do you see in the family's future, or in the future of the church? By that I mean, the whole Christian church, worldwide. I also mean the Lutheran Church in this country and elsewhere. I also mean this congregation of the church—Zion Lutheran Church. I also mean, you, personally, as a unique saint in this place and time. What do you see ahead and how might we steer toward or away from it?

Now look inside. How are you? I mean *really*. How are you? What is working, and what is not? What is broken? What is healing beautifully? What is aching for more attention? How can we nurture each other in the process of healing?

And now look around. Whose struggle calls to you? What kinds of news stories break your heart or make you mad? How might that pain be addressed? With whom is God inviting you—or us—to be in relationship, and how are we honoring or ignoring that invitation?

All of these are important questions, and good to consider at any time. But I think it is especially good to explore them at this time of year. Because you know, it's going to get dark now. It isn't just the time change. In general, those of us in the Western hemisphere are entering the darkest time of the year. For a lot of people, this impending darkness is very upsetting. Those with tendencies toward depression feel those urges even more strongly. Literal darkness often seems to evoke some sort of inner darkness.

I'm sure you have noticed, as I have, that everything seems scarier when it's dark. It's one thing to hear the roof or floors creak in your home in the mid-

afternoon and another to hear those sounds at 2 a.m. It's one thing to notice a sore throat or mysterious ache in a brightly lit sanctuary at 10 a.m., and another altogether when you are lying alone in your bed at night. Somehow in the dark, creaks become monsters or burglars, and sore throats and backs become incurable diseases. It doesn't have to make logical sense; it's reality for a lot of people. So let's strategize right now, right here, while it's daylight. How can we prepare for the darkness?

Who or what lights up the dark for you? To what or to whom do I look to for help when life seems unmanageable? Sometimes we look for help from the medical community, or from counselors or support groups. Sometimes we have a good friend to call. Sometimes we read about how others handled similar situations. I hope that sometimes you would call your pastor or a spiritual friend who would pray with you and for you.

In the end, efforts to beat back the darkness are futile. Darkness is still going to come.

This is exactly why we need the Church. I don't mean the building. I mean the family of God. When it gets dark, we need light to see by, and we need people who will shine it for us when we can't carry on alone. Don't the monsters usually go away when a parent or loving caretaker comes in to sit with you, read a story, or hold your hand? Don't you suddenly feel like you can bear the bad news if someone you trust is nearby? Even if it's still dark, it's just not as bad as it was when you were alone.

The Church is nothing more and nothing less than people who will be with us in the dark. People who will stand beside us, sharing bits of bread and wine and daily trials and delights with us. Companions who will sing when our hearts get stuck in our throats. People who will pray when our pipeline to God feels clogged up. What we need most of the time to deal with the darkness is company. That is why we profess in the Creed, "I believe in the holy catholic church, the communion of saints."

Although there may be saints we desperately wish were still among us in the flesh, the grand and glorious truth is that the church, the communion of saints, is always present, just as our family is always related to us, whether we like it or not, whether we live far apart geographically or not. We live amid a great cloud of witnesses that is connected in ways we cannot even imagine.

What will we take with us into the darkness? We take the family of saints. We take the promise that we are God's own children forever. We take the seal of the Cross of Christ on our foreheads that marks us as part of the communion of saints for eternity. We take Jesus' promise to be with us today, tomorrow, and always, in the light and in the dark. We take with us our patronus. We call it *The Church*. Blessed are we. Amen.