

“REMEMBERING ALL SAINTS”

Ephesians 1:11-23 November 3, 2019

In the United Methodist Church, the first Sunday in November is usually a combination observance of two major feasts: All Saints Day (Nov. 1) and All Souls day (Nov. 2). While All Saints Day commemorates the great historical forerunners to our faith, All Souls Day helps us remember some of the “everyday saints” who have gone before us and have entered into God’s rest.

Today’s text lifts up the glorious resurrection hope that belongs to the saints of God. On this special day of the Christian year, disciples affirm their belief in “the communion of saints,” including our hope for “the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” This hope is essential to our identity as disciples of Jesus Christ, who was resurrected and promises us the same. On this day when we remember the departed saints of the congregation, we celebrate the example of discipleship they provided us in life and the promise of resurrection we hope for in death.

Jan Richardson writes about the trinity of days of Halloween, the Feast of All Saints, and the Feast of All Souls. She comments: ...[this] has long been a favorite time for me—a thin place in the turning of the year. These days are haunted for me in a good way; they offer an occasion to remember, to reflect, and to offer thanks for those who have shaped my path by the path they walked. These days remind us that in the body of Christ, death does not release us from being in community with one another.

As we move thru this week, who lingers close in your memory? Who walked with you in a way that inspired and made possible the path that you travel? Remembering that in these days, the veil thins not only toward the past, but also toward the future, how are you walking through this life in a way that will help make possible the paths of those who follow?

For Those Who Walked With Us

For those
who walked with us,
this is a prayer.

For those
who have gone ahead,
this is a blessing.

For those
who touched and tended us,
who lingered with us
while they lived,
this is a thanksgiving.

For those
who journey still with us
in the shadows of awareness,
in the crevices of memory,
in the landscape of our dreams,
this is a benediction.

Celebrating Holy Communion on All Saints’ Day—especially when we utilize the All Saints’ Day liturgy of the Great Thanksgiving as I will today

from the United Methodist Book of Worship—helps affirm our hope that one day all the saints will gather around the great banquet table in the final kingdom of God. After all, while we mourn those who have passed on in the past year, we celebrate the life they and all of us will enjoy in the heavenly kingdom—a life of joy not sorrow, laughter instead of tears.

Susan was in the hospital, near death. Susan's sister was talking to another member of their family on a cell phone. The sister whispered softly into the phone, "You better come soon. She might not last much longer." Susan, who overheard the conversation, said, "I'm not ready to go yet." This made everyone feel uncomfortable, so they quickly changed the subject. But Susan stubbornly said again, much louder, "I'm not ready to go yet!!" With that she sat up in the bed and said to the hospital chaplain, "Let's dance. How about Patsy Cline's 'Crazy'?" The chaplain let the room and managed to roust up a boom box and a Patsy Cline CD. When he returned to the room, Susan gave orders to push the furniture back. With a frail body, yet a strong resolve, Susan stood up, and she and the chaplain began to dance to Patsy Cline's "Crazy." At first, all the family members stared in disbelief. But then all of them found a partner and joined the dance. When the dancing was over, Susan went back to bed, and she died a few days later. At her funeral they both laughed and cried as they remembered the dance and how it illustrated her great love for life, even in death.

What an image! Dancing at death's door! But as Christian believers, we can do exactly that. We can—in spite of fear and pain and grief—face death with hope and promise. We, like Susan, can go out dancing. So, as we call out the names of those who have died this past year or we wish to remember on this All Saints Sunday, it's OK to shed tears and feel grief as we acknowledge the reality of our mortality. But let us remember that death is only half the story. The other half of the story is resurrection and eternal life. So, even in death, let us remember to dance.

As we now take the time to remember those loved ones who have departed from this life in the past year and years past and who watch over us from the Heavenly Kingdom we will name each one, followed by a brief pause and the response: "Re-joicing in your life. Amen."