

November 5, 2017 All Saints Sunday
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Revelation 7:9-17, 1 John 3:1-3
Matthew 5:1-12

Beloved, we are God's children now. Grace and peace through our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Our refrigerator is covered with pictures.

I don't mean just a few pictures or a dozen, or two or four.

I mean a collage, face by face by face, kids in snowsuits and people on vacations,
sweet dogs, friends and family, friends who are family.

They are taped on with an enormous amount of scotch tape
lest the prying fingers of four year olds try to rest them away.

This collage is a ritual I adapted from my pastor's wife growing up:

Someday I wanted to plaster my fridge with pictures...and so we do.

Christmas cards get snipped apart, graduation announcements, and all the rest that come our way.
More than a few of you are "on the fridge".

That's what I say to our daughters when we're talking about this friend or that:

"Oh, they are on the fridge, we'll find them when we get home."

Yearly I revitalize the collage, renewing some, trimming and then re-taping the ones that are perennials,
never to be replaced, always on the fridge.

One of my favorites includes my Grandma and Grandpa Ruga and my great aunt Noner,
Grandma's older sister, who lived out her years in a third floor walk up in the city of St. Louis.
These three have been gone from this earth for years,

why Noner would be well beyond 100 if she were still alive.

In the photo, this triumvirate sits together on the couch in the house long ago sold,
relaxed, a cane causally propping up grandpa's hands, the ever-present pocket protector,
laughing, all of them laughing.

God knows they didn't always laugh together,

for a lifetime of one another's idiosyncrasies certainly was wearing, and life held its share of pain,
saints and sinners, they were...we are.

But in that picture they are laughing, laughing hard, free, gracious, loving.

Our refrigerator is covered by pictures.

Let me rephrase that: Our refrigerator is covered by saints.

John writes in Revelation: After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all the tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.

Jesus in Matthew looked out at the crowds and sat down on that mountain side and cried, blessed, blessed, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, blessed are the pure in heart, blessed, blessed, blessed.

John August Swanson has a painting called Festival of Light, perhaps you've seen it, savored it. A blue starry night sky, the green hills, a river of candle-carrying people streaming together, faces aglow. John August Swanson doesn't cite today's image from Revelation, the multitude that no one could count, from every nation, all the tribes, so many languages, but his painting often conjures this for me: The blessed saints, faces aglow with God's own light.

And that brings us to today, and to candle light, to names and memories, to inspiration and legacy, and that promise of our Savior: they will hunger no more, thirst no more, the lamb at the center will be their shepherd and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

On All Saints Sunday we commemorate and name the saints—those faithful who have died, those still living, not perfect people, but real people, faithful souls, children of God, those who have touched us and shaped us, those whose memories waft up in the smell of perfume or pipe smoke or the house on a summer day, those whose voice raised in song or prayer or laughter returns us to another time.

Who are your saints? Who has inspired your living? Who has blessed your days?

For whom have you sat vigil, holding a hand, whispering a prayer, unsure how the world could go on?

We're remembering the saints at rest, and we're remembering the saints still living.

Look to your side, look around, squeeze a hand: the saints of God.

One of you told me this week of the friend who taught you how to laugh, brought that part of you alive.

Someone else vividly described a group of friends: their encouragement in growing up and growing older.

Our meal of Holy Communion always crosses time and space, welcoming in not only each of you, but indeed the saints gathered at holy tables around the world, hearing the promise, tasting the forgiveness, hungry for mercy and justice and love,

and, always the saints who have come before us and who partake in this feast eternal.

The names placed around the communion rail today, those first five we read at the start of the service, these are members of this congregation who have died this year and join the saints triumphant, the saints at rest.

In the next moments, I invite you to come forward as you are moved.

Light candles remembering your saints.

And as you are at your seat, join in singing and add your prayers. Amen.