

November 3, 2019 All Saints Sunday

Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18, Psalm 149

Ephesians 1:11-23, Luke 6:20-31

Nora McInerney: https://www.ted.com/talks/nora_mcinerney_we_don_t_move_on_from_grief_we_move_forward_with_it?language=en

Linda Hogan: <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/494268-walking-i-can-almost-hear-the-redwoods-beating-and-the>

Grace and peace to you, Beloved Saints of God. Amen.

There's Christmas. And there's Easter. The two biggies.

And then, there's All Saints.

All Saints may not rank in some congregations but here, in this community, I've learned, it's one of the high holy days.

On All Saints Sunday we name aloud those who have died this year, tolling the bell, lighting the candles.

And when the light is already bright, we light still more flames,

conjuring the names, the faithfulness, the struggle,

the living and dying of so many who have gone before us.

And that's not all: we're marking our grief and, at once, we're claiming our hope in Christ Jesus.

On the rail around our communion table are the names of those members of University Lutheran Church of Hope who have joined the saints eternal this year:

Joy, Shirley, and Marjorie;

Robert, Iona, and Bob;

David and Eleanor;

Trish, Ruth Ann, and Jean.

In Holy Communion today, and every Sunday, we join them in this rich meal,
this promised foretaste of the feast to come.

Over the last weeks, I've been compiling our list of saints for this year.

Often names were quietly added to the list, but sometimes, sometimes, you sent them as an email with a little note, or you shared why they are important to you.

The saints we name today are our parents and grandparents.

They are our spouses, and former spouses.

They are our children, our children's children, or our friend's children.

They are our siblings, and aunts and uncles and cousins.

They are friends with whom we have laughed and learned, cried and danced.

They are the faithful, with whom we've prayed and labored, and received forgiveness.

They are beloved family pets.

They are English teachers and clarinet teachers, and mentors-lots of mentors.

They are next door neighbors, and community and civic leaders.

They are patients of medical professionals, cared for well in life, and remembered in death.

They are co-conspirators in the movement.

Some of these saints were named more than once from different angles, likely by different people not even realizing that someone else sitting across the sanctuary, was also shaped by them.

As we hear in the letter to the Ephesians: "I do not cease to give thanks for you..."

Clearly we each come to this day with our particular stories, our memories, our tears, and yet we know that grief is universal, it's human.

One of you shared recently the wise words of Nora McInerny:

"You don't move on from grief, you go forward with it."

The bright flames of this day remind me that we go forward with our grief, with our stories, with our tears.

To lean into our Celtic theology, these are **thin places** in which earth and heaven are close.

Why is All Saints such an important festival in this congregation and others?

Why does the Latinx community celebrate Dia de los Muertos with such energy?

Why was the movie Coco such a hit?

Why?

There's something in our wiring that draws our hearts and minds to this thin place.

Days like this give us reason, even permission, if you will, to dwell there, to linger.

It's sacred, it's holy.

This is the place where we recognize that those who have gone before us are here with us, they shape us still, they are part of us.

Nick Tangen, from our staff, tells how in the Benedictine community, and I would suspect in other monastic communities, when a monk was making their final vows, they would be given their coffin.

They'd keep it with them over the years, some, I imagine, making it a special place in their room, with candles or the bible or the like.

Others, preferring to use it for storing bulky things or athletic equipment.

The Rule of Benedict has a line, "Keep death before you always."

There's something very thin place-ish, normalizing, about this practice of giving a coffin.

Some cultures, ours included, fight this thin place of death and life, we sanitize it, closet it.

But it's real, and it's heavy.

Often it's messy with tears and bodies.

Maddening with personalities and struggle.

Sometimes it's lonely.

And, at once, it's beautiful, and holy, and resilient,

and God is close, Christ Jesus is close, even when we may feel utterly alone.

Poet, storyteller, environmentalist Linda Hogan is the Chickasaw Nation's Writer in Residence.

In her book *Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World*, she writes,

"Suddenly all my ancestors are behind me.

Be still, they say.

Watch and listen.

You are the result of the love of thousands."

Blessed saints of God, why is this such a high holy day? A thin place?

Why is the vale so thin?

As we remember the saints, we are pulled into a love so deep, a promise so wide, and nothing, nothing can
separate us from the love of God, and the love of these thousands.

Be still, then, be still, watch and listen.

"You [too, dear ones,] are the result of the love of thousands."

In the name of God, the Creator, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**