

SERMON DELIVERED AT AUBURN UMC, AUBURN, MICHIGAN

All Saints Sunday
Year B

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November 1, 2015

Text: Hebrews 12:1-3

Title: "For All the Saints"

Before this morning's portion of scripture from the book of Hebrews, the writer writes about what faith means: *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* And then we hear a list of names of those who had gone before them, people who had died but who were examples of what it means to have faith. Names like: Abel, Enoch, and Noah, Abraham, Moses, Israelites, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets. All of them says the writer lived their lives in ways that demonstrated their confidence in God's will and way. All of them reflected the Spirit of God in them, through them, beyond them. And then we read these words

12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

³ Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.

Jesus, more than any other reflected the presence and power of God, "the perfecter of our faith" as he willingly gave his life that people like us would see what God is willing to do in order to reveal how deep and powerful God's love is for all. Those of us who live now have heard that story from someone else who was more than likely born before we were. Whether it was through scripture or a human witness, others told us the story and revealed what faith in Christ looks like.

(The following was inspired by and borrowed from:
<http://faithformationjourneys.blogspot.com/>).

This morning we have 8 chairs up here representing the generations. I'd like to ask 6 people who are willing to come and sit in the chair representing your generation to come and sit in your respective chair. And then I'll call the children forward to share the message for this

morning.

(Ask people to come: GI Generation (1901-1924), Silent (1925-1945), Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Gen X (1965-1985), Gen Y (1978-1990), Gen Z 1995-2007 or today. When all are seated ask the children to come. Explain the chairs and generations to the children saying that they represent all the different ages living now.)

"Why do we have empty chairs on each end?"

(Take their answers and guide them to understanding that the empty chairs show the generations of people who have not been born and also the ones that have all lived before us. Continue with a simple explanation of All Saints Day.)

Today we are remembering all the people who have gone before us and specifically we will say the names of the people who died this year. We call this All Saints day not because they are people that never did anything wrong but because they were people who were important in teaching and living faith in God even though they had struggles and sorrows and joys just like we do. We take time to remember that God's promises are for us and that they have been passed down and told to us because of the generations before. And these living people--they are the saints that tell us the story now and share their faith with each other and with the next generations.

And this other empty chair shows that there are people yet to be born that will need to hear the story. And who will tell them about God's promises and love? That's right, you and the others who are here to live and walk in faith with them."

God promises to bring new life to us here on earth and to restore us all together in God's kingdom. It's a promise for the future but it's also a promise for today that God is here with us and loving us all through our lives no matter our age.

Let's pray together and then we will offer a blessing to all the generations. Jesus, you give us many people to share the story of God's love. Be with each person, young and old, and be with us today as we remember the people who have died and how you love them too. Amen

(Have the children stand and gather around the chairs placing their hands on heads and shoulders. Say this blessing together or have just the leaders say it:)

May you know the love and presence of God who is here in all ages. Amen

RINGING OF THE BELLS TO REMEMBER AND CELEBRATE THE DECEASED AND THE BORN

Holy God,
meet us here in this place
as we mourn those who have died this year:

sons and daughters
mothers and fathers
siblings and grandparents
partners and friends

*at the same time celebrating new birth among us
children and grandchildren
siblings and friends.*

(Invite families to come forward as the name of their loved one is read, light a candle and receive a small bouquet. As each death is read, a bell—or whatever Pat and Gabe decide-- sounds.)

We remember and honor the memory of parents, children, siblings, friends and partners who died this year. Yet, we also celebrate the gift of children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews born:

(As each birth is read, a chime—or whatever Pat and Gabe decide--is rung.)

Holy God of wind and fire;
Dance through this room today.
Holy God of earthquakes and illness;
Share our tears of sadness and pain.
Holy God of creation and new beginnings;
Show us again your vision of healing and wholeness.